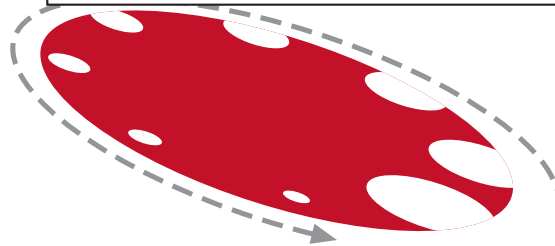


CADRE
 Consortium for Appropriate Dispute
 Resolution in Special Education



Educating our Children Together:

*A Sourcebook for
 Effective Family- School-
 Community Partnerships*



*Susanne Carter
 October 2003*

CADRE is funded by



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Dear Parents and Families, Educators and Members of the Community:

It is my pleasure to commend the following document to your attention and to express my appreciation to all those who assisted in its creation. We believe that the document will be of real assistance to schools throughout America as they explore opportunities to fully involve parents and the community in ways that lead to improved outcomes for students. CADRE (the National Center on Dispute Resolution, which is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs at the United States Department of Education) partnered with New York State Education Department, office of VESID in its development. The assistance of many other individuals and organizations is noted in the acknowledgements included in the opening pages of the document.

This document provides practical information for parents and families, educators and administrators, and individuals involved in programs that support partnerships between families, schools and communities. It has been developed to support and promote creative solutions through the sharing of resources and information about family-school-community partnerships.

Parents and family members play an important role in the education of their children, and can provide the keys to success for their children during their school years and transition to adult life. The partnership of parents, families, educators and members of the community has been shown to have a positive effect on educational outcomes for students. Research has shown that family involvement has a powerful influence on a child's school experience, improving a child's achievement, attendance, attitudes, behavior, test scores, and long-term outcomes.

We look forward to implementing many of the enclosed recommendations in New York schools and are optimistic about the results we will achieve as we further New York's commitment to excellence in education.

Sincerely,

Lawrence C. Gloeckler



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Letter of Introduction	3
Preface	6
Introduction	8
Guiding Principles	21
Getting Started	21
Family Involvement Strategies	24
Matrix of Activities	27
<hr/>	
Strategy 1: Creating a family-friendly school environment	28
Family-friendly Schools	29
“Fortress” Schools	29
Middle School Family Involvement	30
Building Family-friendly Atmospheres	31
<hr/>	
Strategy 2: Building a support infrastructure	34
Family centers	35
Family coordinator/liaison	38
Resource commitment	38
<hr/>	
Strategy 3: Encouraging family involvement	40
Strategies for building an effective volunteer system:	42
Family involvement in decision making	44
<hr/>	
Strategy 4: Developing family-friendly communication	48
Neighborhood walks	49
Family focus groups	52
Home visits	52
Informal principal meetings	53
Positive “warm” telephone calls	53
Home-school notes/notebooks	54
Conferences	54
Newsletters	55
Technology tools	56
Processes for resolving family concerns	57

Strategy 5: Supporting family involvement on the homefront	59
Age-appropriate family involvement	61
Guidance on student learning	62
Involving families in homework activities	63
Homework helping services.....	63
Action research projects	63
Functional behavioral assessments	64
Strategy 6: Supporting educational opportunities for families	65
Home visits by parent educators.....	66
Parent workshops	66
Programs that support parents' own educational needs.....	67
Programs that develop parent leadership	68
Parent/child education opportunities	68
Support groups	69
Teen parenting programs	70
Strategy 7: Creating family-school-community partnerships	71
Benefits of school-family-community collaborations.....	73
Barriers to school-family-community collaborations.....	74
Community learning centers	74
Full-service/community schools	75
Wraparound services	76
Parent Training and Information Centers	76
School-business partnerships	77
Strategy 8: Preparing educators to work with families	78
Policies and practices	81
Family Involvement Framework for Teacher Training	83
Parents as faculty.....	84
Evaluation	85
Sample Calendar of Family Involvement Activities	87
Contacts/Resources	89
References	98

PREFACE

In the Fall of 2001, the **Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities** (VESID) at the **New York State Education Department** expressed an interest in technical assistance from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the United States Department of Education to further their efforts to encourage positive parent involvement in schools. Based on that communication, CADRE (the OSEP-funded National Center on Dispute Resolution) began working with VESID staff to develop a technical assistance plan. It was agreed that an important first step would be to convene a small work group of educators and parent leaders to identify priority activities. Prior to that meeting, CADRE was asked to summarize research on parent involvement from the past decade and present it to the work group. That summary, ***The Impact of Parent/Family Involvement on Student Outcomes: An Annotated Bibliography of Research During the Past Decade*** (Carter, 2002), clearly documented the value of family involvement in education and demonstrated the relationship between parent involvement and improved student outcomes.

When the work group convened in spring 2002, it reviewed the bibliography and developed a plan for future activities. It was agreed that an initial focus for the initiative would be to assist “low-performing” schools in identifying and implementing activities that would lead to higher levels of positive parent engagement. It was agreed that CADRE would put together a “sourcebook” that would identify and describe promising practices in family-community-school involvement occurring in pre-K-12 school environments across the country. An initial draft was reviewed by an expanded group of parents and educators in October, 2002, who provided feedback on ways the document might be strengthened.

A New York state-focused version of the sourcebook was completed in the winter of 2004. This expanded version includes additional descriptions of programs and resources from 16 states, providing a more national perspective. It was compiled as a resource for educators to use to build effective school-family-community involvement. Although the focus of the sourcebook is on building-level strategies for school personnel, the ideas should be useful to these others as well:

- *Family members*: to gain ideas about how families can be effectively involved in school-family-community activities;
- *Community members*: to learn how community members can build successful partnerships with schools and families;
- *Teacher education faculty members and students*: to research and study family involvement practices and programs;
- *Policymakers, including legislators, state and national organization leaders, and state and national education department officials*: to help shape state and national policies and legislation regarding family involvement in schools;
- *Funding agencies*: to gain information about family-involvement practices occurring across the country that are worthy of financial support.

This sourcebook is based on the belief that schools that make an investment in developing family-friendly policies and environments where educators work closely with families avoid becoming “islands separated from the families they serve” (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 232). Schools that demonstrate a commitment to open communication and collaborative problem solving with families can go a long

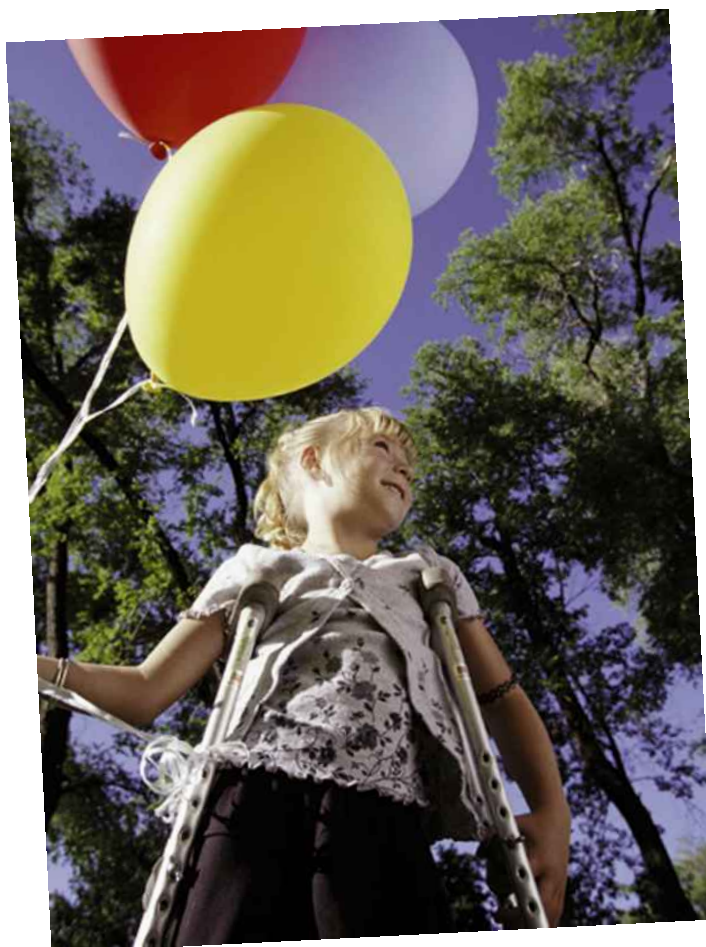
way toward preventing the onset and escalation of adversarial school-family relationships that inevitably detract from the mission of helping children learn.

Not all the strategies included will work for every school. To be most effective, school administrators and teachers, in consultation with parents and community representatives, should select strategies based upon each individual school's needs, priorities, resources, student population, and community support. Many of the strategies can also be adapted to fit local school/district needs.

The sourcebook includes guiding principles for family-school-community involvement, tips for getting started, a self-assessment tool to determine current practices, strategies, and program descriptions that have been organized according to the following interrelated eight “cluster strategies”:

1. Creating a family-friendly school environment
2. Building a support infrastructure
3. Encouraging family involvement
4. Developing family-friendly communication
5. Supporting family involvement on the homefront
6. Supporting educational opportunities for families
7. Creating family-school-community partnerships
8. Preparing educators to work with families

Additionally, a comprehensive index of family involvement practices is included for each “cluster strategy” as well as resources for evaluating the effectiveness of family involvement activities. A sample school calendar of family involvement activities, a bibliography, and a list of contacts for additional information and references are also included.



Introduction

So much is riding on our schools. As parents and communities, we have entrusted them with our greatest resource and tangible investment in the future: our children. The sheer magnitude of what we ask of these institutions—to promote learning, prepare a workforce and create a citizenry — puts them at the heart of our communities and endows them with special status. (Melaville & Blank, 1998)

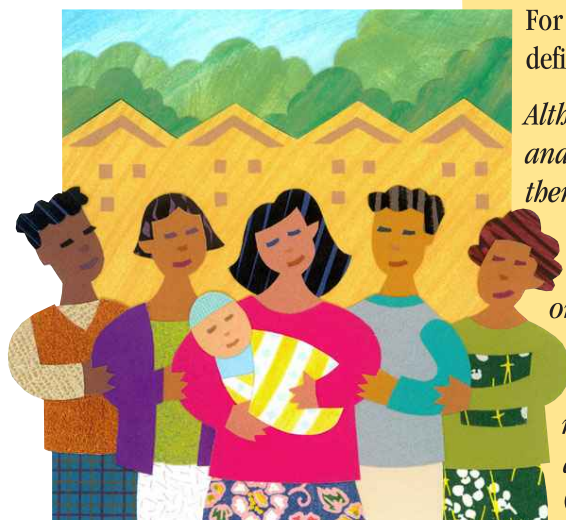
Education in the 21st century means much more than providing students with academic knowledge and skills.

“Educators alone cannot help children develop intellectually, personally, socially, and morally — develop all the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to be productive citizens and caring people as adults” (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 27). Educating children to live in our rapidly changing and increasingly complex society “requires contributions and commitments from everyone in the community” (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 288).

Although, as this sourcebook demonstrates, many schools, communities and families are working closely together to meet children’s educational needs, all too often schools seem to be “islands separated from the families they serve and the communities in which their students live” (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 232). In its ***Final Report on Family Wise Focus Groups***, the **Colorado Foundation for Families and Children** (2002) reported that “while many families cited their children’s schools as being a source of support for their family, others saw the schools as being neutral at best and a threat at worst” (p. 9). Some of the most frequently cited concerns, which crossed ethnic and socioeconomic lines, were the perceived lack of caring on the part of teachers, the perception of playing favorites, class size, weapons in schools, and grade promotion without evidence of learning.

Because schools, communities, and families play interconnected roles in this crucial mission of educating children, they must find ways to work together as educational partners (***National PTA, Building Successful Partnerships***, 2000). And providing parents with information and resources to support their children’s education is a cornerstone of the **No Child Left Behind Act**.

What is a family?



For this sourcebook we have chosen to use the broad and inclusive definition of “family” offered by Turnbull and Turnbull (1997):

Although families from different cultures define themselves in many and varied ways, we define family as two or more people who regard themselves as a family and who perform some of the functions as a family and who perform some of the functions that families typically perform. These people may or may not be related by blood or marriage and may or may not usually live together. Thus, four generations of women who are living together might call themselves a family unit; another family might describe a broad network of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and a host of others who are part of close-knit family relationships (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1995, p. 11).

The terms “parent” or “parent involvement” in this guidebook refer to any member of a “family” who is actively involved in raising, supporting and educating children.

WHAT IS FAMILY INVOLVEMENT?

We use the term “family involvement” in this sourcebook in an expansive way to include and recognize the value of a broad spectrum of activities that involve family members and/or guardians helping children to learn, both at home and at school. The single parent who works two jobs to support her three children and makes sure they are safe, loved, and fed each morning before school is “involved.” The significant other who attends the IEP meeting of his partner’s child is “involved.” The grandparents with temporary custody of their two grandchildren who clear a space at the kitchen table for them to do homework are “involved.” The foster parents who keep their foster children’s birth parents informed of their children’s progress in school are “involved.” The immigrant parents who cannot speak English and are unfamiliar with the American school system but are passing on a strong work ethic to their children are “involved.” The father serving in the Air Force Reserves who is deployed on a military mission and records audiotapes of himself reading books for his preschooler to hear while he is away is “involved.” The stepfather who volunteers to judge a debate tournament at his stepson’s high school is “involved.” The Bosnian parents who volunteer to teach their daughter’s school staff about the Bosnian language and culture are “involved.” So too is the aunt caring for her nephew with spina bifida who becomes a strong advocate for his needs.

Ten Truths of Parent Involvement

1. All parents have hopes and goals for their children. They differ in how they support their children’s efforts to achieve those goals.
 2. The home is one of several spheres that simultaneously influence a child. The school must work with other spheres for the child’s benefit, not push them apart.
 3. The parent is the central contributor to a child’s education. Schools can either co-opt that role or recognize the potential of the parent.
 4. Parent involvement must be a legitimate element of education. It deserves equal emphasis with elements such as program improvement and evaluation.
 5. Parent involvement is a process, not a program of activities. It requires ongoing energy and effort.
 6. Parent involvement requires a vision, policy, and framework. A consensus of understanding is important.
 7. Parents’ interaction with their own children is the cornerstone of parent involvement. A program must recognize the value, diversity, and difficulty of this role.
 8. Most barriers to parent involvement are found within school practices. They are not found within parents.
 9. Any parent can be “hard to reach.” Parents must be identified and approached individually; they are not defined by gender, ethnicity, family situation, education, or income.
 10. Successful parent involvement nurtures relationship and partnerships. It strengthens bonds between home and school, parent and educator, parent and school, school and community.
- (RMC Research Corporation, 1999)

TODAY'S FAMILIES TAKE MANY DIFFERENT FORMS

American families are more diverse than ever before, spanning cultures, languages, levels of education, and socioeconomic and demographic differences. In the year 2000 one out of every three Americans was of African American, Hispanic, Asian American, or Native American heritage (Bureau of the Census, 1997). Contemporary families can be described as “traditional, blended, extended, multi-generational, migrant, minority, single-parent, divorced, dual-worker, and refugee” (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997). In 2001, 27% of children in the U.S. were living in single-parent homes, and 40% of children living with their mothers had not seen their fathers during the past year (National Fatherhood Initiative, 2001). Additionally, children being raised by grandparents are a growing population (Rothenberg, 1996), and many children live with extended family members or with foster parents.

These rapid and continuing changes in the American family have vastly complicated the issue of how to involve families in their children's education and pose some significant questions for educators to consider:

How can we stimulate more parent involvement if mothers work outside the home? Which parents do we try to reach: the stepparent a child lives with, the father who lives across town, the kindergartner's 34-year-old grandmother, or perhaps her 19-year-old mother? What responsibility do we have to help children cope with the stress of their parents' breaking up? How can we ask overburdened single parents to help teachers educate their children? How can we be adequately sensitive to cultural, social and economic differences, and collaborate with parents who cannot speak English or whose cultural background makes our way of thinking and doing things almost incomprehensible? (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986, p. xv)

Because of the variety of students' backgrounds, reaching out to families has become increasingly complex for schools. Educators who define families in more narrow terms may have assumptions that make it difficult for them to understand the families of many of their students. The San Diego City Schools (1991) identified the following “common assumptions” held by educators that can either hinder or facilitate home-school collaboration.

Educators' Assumptions that Hinder or Facilitate Home-School Collaboration	
<i>Assumptions that Hinder Collaboration</i>	<i>Assumptions that Facilitate Collaboration</i>
Parents who don't attend school events don't care about their children's success in school.	Not all parents can come to school or feel comfortable about it; that doesn't mean they don't care.
Parents who are illiterate, non-English speaking, or unemployed can't help their children with school.	All families have strengths and skills they can contribute to their children's school success.
Parents from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds don't understand how to help their children with school.	Parents from different ethnic and racial groups may have alternative and important ways of supporting their children.
It's up to parents to find out what is going on at school.	Schools have a responsibility to reach out to all parents.
Parent involvement is not worth educators' effort.	Parent involvement pays off in improved student achievement, improved school effectiveness, and increased parent and community satisfaction.

Identifying these assumptions is a first step toward changing them and determining ways for educators to encourage family involvement in school (Caplan, 2001, p. 7).

Recognition of Family Strengths

Parents are a child's "first and most influential" teachers and often their strongest advocates. Parents "teach, model and guide their children" (Rockwell, Andrew, & Hawley, 1996, p. 25). They are the "big picture" team members in their child's education. Many parents spend 365 days a year with their children and are the most knowledgeable about their history, interests, and abilities (Rockwell, Andrews & Hawley, 1996, p. 26). Providing opportunities for parents to share information about their children can help families and educators avoid conflict and develop collaborative relationships that encourage the best educational opportunities for students.

This sharing of information is especially important for the families of children with disabilities. These family members are valuable sources of information, as they know the history and understand the nature of their children's disabilities. Children with disabilities may need special assistance and may have specific medical concerns, assistive technology needs, transportation needs, feeding issues, or behavioral/social concerns that need to be conveyed by families to educators.

Although the American family has changed dramatically over the last half century, with increasing numbers of single-parent households, more varied family structures, increasing numbers of working mothers, less father involvement, more children living in poverty, and a rising number of homeless families (Moore, Chalf, Scarpa, & Vandivere, 2002), Whitaker and Fiore (2001) maintain that "parents are parents" — that today's parents are not significantly different from parents of 50 years ago. "Parents still want what is best for their children" (Christopher, 1996, p. 5). Regardless of the challenges that families face, all have unique strengths worthy of recognition and respect (Moore, Chalf, Scarpa, & Vandivere, 2002).

*"One thing I have learned will stay with me no matter where I go or where I teach:
Never underestimate the power of a parent."*

Carla Becker, teacher, Norwalk, Iowa
(Stone, 1999)

"I'm poor, I'm single, I'm a mom, and I deserve respect."

Mothers living in poverty face more complex challenges to becoming involved in their children's education than do middle-class mothers (Bloom, 2001). "Mothers in poverty, lacking in one or more important resources such as academic skills, emotional well-being, positive ties in schools, a sense of entitlement to be involved in schools, flexible schedules, and money may find involvement extremely burdensome and psychologically taxing" (Bloom, 2001). When they fail to live up to the expectations of schools for family involvement, mothers living in poverty often feel that they are viewed by the school as part of the problem instead of being welcomed as educational partners. Additionally, mothers who live in poverty indicate that in interactions with schools they often feel "de-skilled" by teachers treating them as if they lack knowledge of their children; "disappeared" by being ignored and disregarded during conversations about their children; "infantilized" by teachers relating to them as if they are students; intimidated by the team approach and professional status of school staff scrutinizing their parenting; and marginalized by their roles in these interactions (Reay, 1999; Bloom, 2001).

*Aside from children's
parents or guardians,
classroom teachers are the
"most significant adults"
in children's lives.*

*"When teachers strive to
work collaboratively with
their students' families in
honoring and including
students, results are
astonishing"*

O'Shea, O'Shea, Algozzine,
& Hammitte, 2001, p. 11).

Bloom (2001) suggests that in addressing poverty-related issues schools should shift their focus from “poor mothers” to the social inequalities and stereotypes perpetuated by the schools’ typically middle-class approach to family involvement. “What needs to be made visible are not the failures of poor mothers,” she contends, “but the failure of the schools to support poor single mothers.”

Beyond Welfare, a community-based, grassroots organization in central Iowa, has developed an advocacy program that assists mothers living in poverty with school-related issues. Volunteer advocates accompany mothers to school and help them “sort out what they are hearing, interrupt the interactions when they are demeaning or humiliating, and remind the staff of the mother’s presence and expert knowledge about her child” (Bloom, 2001).

Insights into Poverty

Bowie Elementary Principal Ruby K. Payne, who has done extensive research on families living in poverty in Illinois, indicates that although poverty is normally thought of in terms of financial resources, these “do not explain the differences in the success with which individuals leave poverty nor the reasons that many stay in poverty. “The ability to leave poverty,” she says, “is more dependent upon other resources than it is upon financial resources” (Payne, 2001, pp. 16-17). Each of these resources — including financial, emotional, mental, spiritual, physical, support systems, relationships/role models, and knowledge of hidden rules — “plays a vital role in the success of the individual.”

Payne concludes from her years of research in studying poverty that:

1. Poverty is relative.
2. Poverty occurs in all races and in all countries.
3. Economic class is a continuous line, not a clear-cut distinction.
4. Generational poverty and situational poverty are different.
5. This work is based on patterns. All patterns have exceptions.
6. An individual brings with him/her the hidden rules of the class in which he/she was raised.
7. Schools and businesses operate from middle-class norms and use the hidden rules of the middle class.
8. For students to be successful, we must understand their hidden rules and teach them the rules that will make them successful at school or work.
9. We can neither excuse students nor scold them for not knowing; as educators we must teach them and provide support, insistence, and expectations.
10. To move from poverty to the middle class or from the middle class to wealth, an individual must give up relationships for achievement (at least for some period of time). (Payne, 2001, pp. 10-11)

Additional Demands of Raising Children with Disabilities

Families who are raising children with disabilities face daily stresses that far exceed those of families with non-disabled children. They must negotiate confusing and complicated human and educational service systems, shopping from place to place, piecing together a blend of services that will meet their child’s needs. In the process, they may receive conflicting information, follow mistaken leads, contend with confusing eligibility criteria, and struggle through baffling application processes. The special education system, in which most children with disabilities are involved, is a complicated one. While families are considered members of the special education team, they frequently arrive on this team with little

knowledge or preparation. Participating in the development of their child's educational program can be overwhelming and intimidating, especially in meetings, where a large group of professionals are speaking unfamiliar educational jargon.

In addition to the stress involved in negotiating the various service systems, families of children with disabilities face financial stresses above and beyond those faced by families of non-disabled children. The cost of raising children with disabilities is much higher than the cost of raising children without disabilities, with more money spent on medical care, therapies, equipment, transportation, childcare, and other needed services. Because there are fewer available after-school, social, recreational, and community programs that meet the needs of children with disabilities, families must spend more time locating these services. In cases where the services are not available, parents may need to take time off work or even quit their jobs to care for their children.

Respecting Cultural Diversity

"All families are embedded in a cultural context and in economic and social realities that shape their lifestyles, attitudes, and childrearing practices" (Smith & Smith, 2003). Reaching out to and connecting with families of different cultural backgrounds "requires that educators develop an understanding of cultural differences, demonstrate respect for the differing values and behaviors of diverse families, and become aware of the unique communication styles of the various cultural groups that are represented in their programs" (Muscott, 2002). Moreover, educators working with culturally diverse families "need to move beyond stereotypes that may be grounded in their own limited frame of reference" (Kugler, 2002) while they "move beyond cultural knowledge and develop an understanding of how each individual family expresses its culture" (Muscott, 2002).

Ariza (2002) recommends that schools "create aggressive plans to educate immigrant parents about their rights and welcome them to the school." Educators need to develop strategies that will help educate parents about their educational rights in a language they can understand in order to: 1) ensure a free, appropriate education for their child; 2) make informed decisions and offer consent before educational actions are taken; 3) be included in any disciplinary actions concerning their children; 4) appeal decisions with which they do not agree; and 5) participate in informational meetings (Young & Helvie, 1996; Ariza, 2002).

Culture encompasses everything around us; it is a part of every environment. Often we forget that children and youth bring their very own culture from home into school, and as a result they may struggle with trying to make it all fit. Successful learning depends greatly on everyone's ability to accept, listen, and embrace cultural diversity so that we can celebrate our unique strengths and contributions to our school community, one which is composed of families (parents and guardians), children and youth, educators, and administrators. Just imagine what can happen if we give ourselves the opportunity to learn from the contributions that our many cultures bring to the table.

Lourdes Rivera-Putz
Program Director, United We Stand of New York

Cross-cultural research indicates that there is no universally successful way to involve families. Even definitions of "involvement" vary in different cultures (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Quiroz, 2001; Dodd & Konzal, 2002).

In some cultures, schools and home are viewed as separate entities, and parents do not view questioning what teachers do at school as their role. In some culturally diverse families, older siblings — not parents — help younger ones by tutoring and helping with homework.

Many families arriving each year from other countries may be experiencing “cultural, social, and linguistic trauma” (Carrasquillo & London, 1993, p. 43). These immigrants may have had little opportunity for formal education in their homelands and may not feel prepared to help their children at home or volunteer in schools (Finders & Lewis, 1994). Additionally, these parents may initially be unfamiliar with the American education system and may not be aware of the social, cultural, and academic skills required for success in American schools (p. 43). In reaching out to culturally diverse families, educators who demonstrate “knowledge and understanding, sensitivity, and respect for cultural differences” can help bridge differences and develop positive relationships with these families (p. 21).

My son is not an empty glass coming into your class to be filled. He is a full basket coming into a different environment and society with something special to share. Please let him share his knowledge, heritage, and culture with you and his peers.

Robert Lake (Medicine Grizzlybear)
Caught Between Two Worlds, 1998

Schools are in a unique position of being capable of reversing the “present power structures in society” that often force minority-language families to adopt the culture of the majority if they want to participate in the education of their children or risk being “marginalized and silenced.” By discovering and building upon the cultural and linguistic strengths of these families, schools can empower families to decide what is best for their children and become involved in whatever ways they feel are appropriate (Blackledge, 2000, p. 145).

If we are going to find solutions to our challenges and grow as a human race, we need to VALUE diversity. For it will be most likely that the answers to our most stubborn questions will be found through the strength in our diversity and our ability to thrive in it.

Dr. Candace White-Ciraco
Coordinator, Research, Planning & Grants
Eastern Suffolk BOCES, Holbrook, New York

Key Practices of Schools Engaging Culturally Diverse Families

Schools that have been successful in engaging culturally diverse families share three key practices. These schools:

- focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members;
- recognize, respect, and address families’ needs, as well as class and cultural difference;
- embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared. (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7)

What the Research Says

In *A New Generation of Evidence*, Henderson and Berla (1994) state: “The evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life” (p. 1). Three decades of research have demonstrated that parent-family involvement is a “critical element of effective schooling” (Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, 1996). Family involvement significantly contributes to improved student outcomes. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, and communities all derive benefits from family involvement, as illustrated in the following table.

Benefits of Better Parent/School Collaboration

<i>Students:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More positive attitudes toward school• Higher achievement, better attendance, and more homework completed consistently• Higher graduation rates and enrollment rates in postsecondary education• Better schools to attend	<i>Parents:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater knowledge of education programs and how schools work• Knowledge of how to be more supportive of children• Greater confidence about ways to help children learn• More positive views of teachers• Greater empowerment
<i>Teachers and Administrators:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater teaching effectiveness• Higher expectations of students• Increased ability to understand family views and cultures• Greater appreciation of parent volunteers• Improved morale• Greater sense of community	<i>Communities:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater strength through collaboration with schools and parents• Greater impact of services through a comprehensive, integrated approach• Increased access to services for families• Greater sense of community

(National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000; Countryman & Eggleston, 1994; Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997; National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, 2002)

In a bibliographical analysis of more than 60 research articles published during the past decade on the impact of family involvement on student outcomes, Carter (2002) made 12 key findings:

1. Effective parent/family involvement improves student outcomes throughout the school years.
2. While parent/family involvement improves student outcomes, variations in culture, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic background affect how families are involved.
3. Parent/family involvement at home has more impact on children than parent/family involvement in school activities.
4. The nature of effective parent/family involvement changes as children reach adolescence.
5. Parent/family involvement in early childhood programs helps children succeed in their transition to kindergarten and elementary school.
6. Parents/families may need guidance and assistance in how to effectively support their children with homework.
7. The many ways that families of differing cultural/ethnic backgrounds are involved in their children's education are valuable and should be respected when planning parent/family involvement programs.

8. Improved student outcomes have been documented in mathematics and literacy when parents/families are involved.
9. The most promising opportunity for student achievement occurs when families, schools, and community organizations work together.
10. To be effective, school programs must be individualized to fit the needs of the students, parents, and community.
11. Effective programs assist parents in creating a home environment that fosters learning and provides support and encouragement for their children's success.
12. Teachers and administrators must be trained to promote effective parent/family involvement.

Changing Perspectives

“Children and families must be at the heart of our education reform efforts, and they must be involved in deciding what services are needed and how they are provided. As educators, we must be committed to flexibility, to teamwork, and to making our families welcome inside our schools. As service providers, we must make the family the center of our efforts, with new hours, new attitudes, and new models that are family-centered and stress the needs of the customer. As policy makers we must place the family at the center of our efforts and make the programs revolve around that center, rather than following old models that have forced the family into the service available, instead of designing the services around the needs of our families and our children.”
(U.S. Department of Education, *School linked*, 1995, p. 24)

For many years the prevailing view of many educators was that families had a very limited role to play at their children's schools:

- parents should come to school only when invited
- stay-at-home mothers served as “room mothers”
- parents visited school mainly for children's performances and open houses
- parents helped raise funds (e.g., bake sales to buy new band uniforms)

“The idea of parents coming in and out of school at any time was seen as intrusive and a challenge to teachers' professionalism” (Johnson, 2001, p. 86). Parents, too, often viewed education professionals as adversaries. Teachers and parents moved in “separate spheres of influence” based upon their individual responsibilities and respective views (parents' focus on “my child” versus educators' responsibility for considering the needs of all students, including individual ones) (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p.86). Under this paradigm, educators asked: “What can parents, community members, and organizations do for us?” (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 25).

Parents' focus on “my child” and educators' focus on “all children” must be extended and reconceptualized to a community concern and commitment for educating all children as “our children.”
(Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 289)

Epstein (1987) challenged this separatism by creating a model of “overlapping spheres of influence” on children's learning that includes family, school, and community. The more compatible these spheres are, the more effective families, schools, and communities are in sharing the responsibility of educating children.

The way in which schools care about children is reflected in the way they care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as *students*, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as *children*, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development. Partners recognize their shared interests in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students. (Epstein, 2001, p. 403)

Schools that have been the most successful in involving families "look beyond traditional definitions to a broader conception of parents as full partners in the education of their children." These schools view children's learning as a "shared responsibility" among stakeholders, including parents, who play important roles in this endeavor (U.S. Department of Education, *Family*, 1997). Educators at these schools ask, "What can all of us together do to educate all children well?" (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 126).

"Schools must recognize that parent involvement activities are not just opportunities for schools to transmit knowledge to parents, but for parents to educate teachers and administrators as well."

(Allegra-Snyder, 1995)

Schools as Extended Family

When children begin their educational careers, the school becomes an "extension of the family": "If learning is to occur, the trust relationship developed between a parent and child during the first years of life must be transferred to school staff" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 27). In order to build a trusting relationship, families need to convey to children that teachers play a "special role" in their lives similar to that of extended family members. In turn, teachers must earn this trust as extended family members in the relationships they build with children and their families.

Studies of resilience have underscored the importance of a "consistently supportive person" in the life of a child (Brodkin & Coleman, 1996). While ideally this should be a parent, if necessary, it can also be another family member, a friend, a neighbor, or a teacher. This individual is one who "unflaggingly communicates the conviction that this child can and will beat the odds. Often this person also serves as a resilient role model" (Brodkin & Coleman, 1996). In addition to offering emotional support, teachers can also nurture resilience by helping students build networks of caring adults who will serve as a positive force in their lives, encouraging activities that will help students develop caring relationships with peers, and teaching students social skills.

A Growing Movement

In 1994 the United States Department of Education created the Partner for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE) to promote children's learning. The partnership is a "broad-based coalition of thousands of schools, families, employers, government and the community that have joined together to address intersecting concerns" (U.S. Department of Education, *Employers*, 1995). The Department of Education supports PFIE partners around the country, providing resources, making connections, sharing best practices, and keeping partners current on educational issues and trends (U.S. Department of Education, *About PFIE*, 1996).

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA), in cooperation with education and parent involvement professionals, also reaffirmed the value of family involvement in its National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (National PTA, 1999). Other organizations, networks, and initiatives involving family-school-community partnerships continue to grow: the National Network of Partnership Schools, the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE), and the Coalition for Community Schools. In 2001, three states — Indiana, Michigan, and Nevada — all passed legislation designed to increase parent involvement in schools (ECS Information Clearinghouse, 2002). In 1990 California was the first state to pass a law requiring local school boards to develop family involvement policies. Subsequently, the state passed the Family School Partnership Act 1994 allowing parents, grandparents, and guardians to spend 40 hours of work time participating in school and licensed child care center activities during the school year (California Department of Education, no date)

The federal government acknowledged the significance of family involvement in Goal 8 of the Goals 2000 legislation: “Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (U. S. Department of Education, *Goals 2000*, 1994). Reflecting this goal, Title I regulations include mandates for family-school connections for states, districts, and schools to obtain and keep federal funds (Epstein, 2001). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorized in 2002 as the *No Child Left Behind Act* also includes provisions for family involvement, including requirements that:

- school report cards be provided to parents of migrant students in the language of the parent, where feasible;
- school districts receiving Title I, Part A funding develop and distribute to parents a written parent involvement policy that establishes expectations for parent involvement;
- schools receiving Title I, Part A funding seek the assistance of parents, educators, and administrators in valuing the contribution of parents, determining how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners, implementing and coordinating parent programs, and building ties between parents and schools;
- schools receiving Title I, Part A funding convene an annual meeting to provide parents with timely information about programs, a description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school, the forms of academic assessment used to measure student progress, and the proficiency levels students are expected to meet;
- schools receiving Title I, Part A funding develop a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will develop a partnership to help children achieve the state’s high standards;
- schoolwide reform plans include parental involvement and partnerships with parents and communities; and schools include parents in the planning of professional development activities and activities associated with other federally funded programs (Boland & Foxworth, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The law also “establishes school-linked or school-based parental information and resource centers that provide training, information, and support to parents, and to individuals and organizations that work with parents, to implement parental involvement strategies that lead to improvements in student academic achievement” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Other federal, state, and local policies also mandate and/or encourage partnership activities.

If we are serious about leaving no child behind, we must broaden our notion of accountability, accepting that the school’s impact is more modest than we wish, the family’s more robust than we have acknowledged.

**Robert Evans, “Family matters: The real crisis in education,”
Education Week, May 22, 2002**

Parent advocacy for educational rights for their children resulted in the passage of PL 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act) in 1975. The percentage of students in public schools receiving special education services has risen steadily since then (Public Agenda Online, 2002). Successive reauthorizations and amendments to this initial legislation have involved teachers and families working together to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorized in 1997 provides an even stronger mandate for parent involvement than any preceding special education legislation (O'Shea, O'Shea, Algozzine, and Hammitte, 2001). The law requires that parents of children receiving special education services must actively participate in the design of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for their child.

Collaboration with families is Target 4 of 7 included in the National Agenda for Children and Youth With Serious Emotional Disturbance (U. S. Department of Education, *Sixteenth annual*, 1994). The target stresses the need to collaborate with families through active decision making that respects parents as partners rather than clients (Cheney and Osher, 1997). "Services," according to Target 4, "should be open, helpful, culturally competent, accessible to families, and school-based as well as community-based" (U. S. Department of Education, *Sixteenth annual*, 1994, p. 119).

While family involvement has clearly reached a "new level of acceptance" today as one of many factors that can help improve the quality of schools, "acceptance does not always translate into implementation, commitment, or creativity" (Drake, 2000, p. 34). In the 15,000 school districts and more than 88,000 schools across the country, much remains to be done. According to Henderson and Raimondo (2001), parent involvement is "truly the most untapped resource that we have."

Barriers to Family Involvement

Most of the time it is not lack of interest that prevents parents from becoming involved in their children's education (State of Iowa, 1998) but challenges such as poverty, single parenting, language/literacy barriers, and cultural and socioeconomic isolation that hinder involvement. A number of other barriers can prevent families from being involved in their children's education. These barriers may originate in the home environment or may be related to school policies and practices:

- School environments that do not support parent/family involvement
- School practices that do not accommodate diverse family needs
- Child care constraints, especially for families with children with disabilities
- Families' past negative experiences with schools and/or feelings of uncertainty about "treading on school 'territory'"
- Families', particularly those who live in poverty, past interactions with schools that have marginalized their contributions
- Cultural differences (language barriers, attitudes toward professionals, lack of knowledge about the American education system, etc.)
- Parents are not aware that they are expected to be involved in their child's education
- Parents are not aware that they have power concerning decision making about their child's education
- Parents believe that the teacher has special authority and they should not question that authority
- Parents feel uncomfortable if there are few or no teachers representing their cultural group
- Parents feel their family status is demeaned if their children are used as interpreters

- Primacy of basic needs (food, clothing and shelter take precedence over educational needs)
 - Feelings of inadequacy associated with differences in income or education
 - Time constraints
 - Intimidating size of the school
 - Safety, especially in inner-city school neighborhoods
 - Uncertainty about how to contribute
 - Uncertainty about how the system works
- (White-Clark & Decker, 1996; Whitaker & Fiore, 2001; Ballen & Moles, 1994; Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997; Jesse, 1995; Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986; Wollman-Bonilla, 2000; Bloom, 2001; Bauer & Shea, 2003; Ariza, 2002)

A 1992 National PTA survey of 27,000 local and unit presidents in the organization indicated that lack of time was by far (89% of respondents) the greatest barrier to family involvement in schools (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997).

Caplan (2001) includes an instrument, “Challenges to Family Involvement Program” (p. 27), that can be used to assess barriers to family involvement and plan strategies to address them.

Families know their children the best and should be respected for that knowledge. Schools have a lot of knowledge about children, but they are not in the relationship for a lifetime. When schools understand and respect what families bring to the table then partnerships can grow.

Susie Nettleton
Finger Lakes Regional Coordinator,
Parent to Parent of New York State

Making Time for Family Involvement

While families may be more diverse than ever before, they share the common trait that they are *all* busy. Families' often hectic pace of life and numerous responsibilities seem to leave little time in the day for “one more thing.” Families who have children with disabilities are often even busier because of the special, more time-consuming needs of their children. In addition to these often overwhelming responsibilities, these families also need to understand the complex laws and legal issues that impact children in special education and their families (Guernsey & Klare, 2001).

The majority of mothers and fathers now work outside of the home to support their families, and many of these parents are raising children by themselves. Their hectic daily lives do not allow large blocks of time to be devoted to “family involvement” activities. In addition, some mothers and fathers are caring for aging parents at the same time that they are raising children, so their time and attention are divided.

Similarly, teachers and administrators are busy people with multiple responsibilities. Family involvement may not be a priority among the many issues that compete for their attention each day. Scarce school resources, in terms of time, personnel, and funds, may make the adoption of any new initiatives seem unreasonable. There may also be provisions in union contracts and collective bargaining agreements that limit the amount of time that educators can devote to family involvement activities. Tight budgets — a reality in most schools — may not support additional activities to encourage more family involvement.

However, for families as well as educators, family involvement need not be a supplemental activity — *one more thing* they have to do each day. Working together with strong administrative support, families, schools, and communities can find effective ways to integrate the most promising strategies into their daily routines so that they mesh with other school improvement initiatives. In this way, family involvement can be viewed by both parents and educators as a valuable and necessary part of what is done each day to help encourage all children to learn.



Guiding Principles

This sourcebook is based on these 12 “guiding principles” for family involvement in education:

1. Family members are equal partners in a child’s education and know their child best.
2. Schools “need families to help them help our children” (Huff, 1999). Efforts must be made to develop “trusting and respectful relationships” and to share power with families (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 8).
3. The home environment is the “primary educational environment” (Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, 1996).
4. Schools must respect the diversity of families and their varied needs.
5. All families care about their children and, “regardless of their income, education, or cultural background, are involved in their children’s learning and want their children to do well” (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 8).
6. Family involvement remains important through all the years of a child’s education.
7. Family involvement takes many forms and may not require a family’s physical presence at school.
8. Families, schools, and communities are closely interconnected, and the responsibility for children’s educational development is a shared one.
9. Educators and parents each have strengths and weaknesses.
10. School leaders and staff need support/training to encourage family involvement.
11. “One size does not fit all” when developing school-family partnerships.
12. “Change takes time,” and building a successful partnership requires “continued effort over time” (Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997).

Getting Started

The many practices in this sourcebook are intended to serve as jumping-off places for schools that are at different stages in building effective family involvement programs. While some of the strategies included here require significant resources, others may be adopted with a minimal outlay of resources. What works in one district may not work in another; all schools, with the input of families and community members, must decide which practices to adopt — or adapt — to meet their particular needs.

Building a strong, caring community takes time and commitment. Everyone must be included, valued, and respected — even when people disagree. Yet bound by a common purpose — the creation of a community home for all children — people working together can make a difference. (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 283)

The first step in getting started is to reach out to families and share the research-based outcomes that document the benefits of family involvement in children's education. This information should be accompanied by the message that schools *need* families to help in the educating of all children, that parent voices are valued in the school, and that families can be involved in the education of their children in many ways (Huff, 1999). This information will be most effective if communicated at the start of the school year (see First Day of School activities, for example, on p. 93) and reinforced throughout the school year through a variety of reminders in newsletters, family fact sheets, school calendars, web site messages, phone messages, workshop sessions, etc., to reach families in as many ways as possible.

Schools should involve family and community members in all phases of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of family involvement strategies. A variety of self-assessment instruments are available that can be used to evaluate a school's current family involvement practices and help guide the planning of strategies to build on the program. These are listed in the ***Evaluation*** section of this document. Data generated by this assessment phase need to be analyzed to determine the current status of family involvement in the school or district and the most appropriate next steps to take. Educators, family members, and community representatives should also consider how any proposed family involvement strategies relate with other ongoing school initiatives to ensure that these initiatives complement one another.

Epstein (2001) recommends a team approach to developing effective school-family-community partnerships, including the following steps:

1. Create an action team with diverse membership

An action team with diverse membership, including school, community, and family members, ensures that various needs and interests are represented. This team takes responsibility for planning, implementing, coordinating, and overseeing action; monitoring progress; solving problems; presenting reports; and designing new directions for building positive connections with families and communities. The team works with other educators, family members, and community organizations to carry out its responsibilities.

2. Obtain funds and other support

The action team will need a modest budget, sufficient time, and social support to do its work. Federal, state, and local sources can be explored to support family involvement programs and the staff needed to coordinate selected activities.

3. Identify starting points

The action team needs to determine starting points for improving family involvement. This may be accomplished through informal means (focus group sessions, telephone interviews, etc.) or more formal questionnaires that solicit ideas from teachers, administrators, family members, and students. Regardless of the methodology used, the information gathered should indicate the school's present strengths, needed changes, expectations, sense of community, and links to goals.

4. Develop a three-year outline and one-year action plan

Based upon the ideas gathered from the identification of starting points, the action team can develop a long-term, three-year plan that includes specific steps to reach the vision of where the school wants to be in three years with its school-family-community involvement program. Additionally, a detailed one-year action plan should outline the first year's work, including specific activities to be implemented, improved, or maintained; a timeline of monthly actions; identification of individuals responsible for and assisting with activities; indicators of how the success of the activities will be evaluated, and other important details. The three-year outline and one-year plan should be shared with educators, families, students, and the community.

5. Continue planning and working

Each year the action team updates the three-year outline and develops a new one-year action plan. The team also needs to keep educators, families, students, and the community “aware of annual progress, new plans, and how they can help.” (pp. 416-20, 577)

Some of the questions the action team must ask, in order to develop and strengthen its partnership programs from year to year, include:

- What are the school's present school-family-community practices?
What do individual teachers do and what does the school do to involve families and communities?

- What are the school's goals for improving student success?

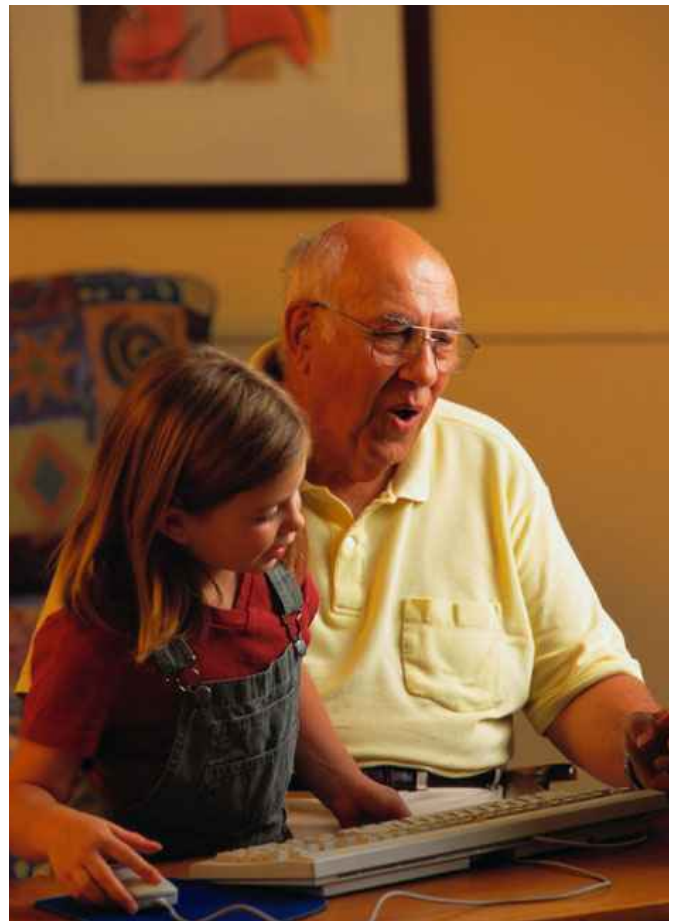
- How do we envision the school's program of school-family-community involvement three years from now?

- What current practices should be maintained or improved?

- What new practices should be added to increase involvement, reach more families, and reach student and school goals?

- How is the school progressing?
What indicators will be used to measure quality of partnership and progress toward goals? How should activities be evaluated to determine their effectiveness?

- How will assessments and evaluations be used to help develop the next one-year action plan?
(Epstein, 2001, p. 579)



Family Involvement Strategies

This guidebook includes more than 80 promising practices that have been implemented effectively by schools to encourage family involvement in education. These practices have been organized into the following eight “cluster strategies,” each of which is described more fully in corresponding sections of this sourcebook:

Strategy 1: Creating a family-friendly school environment

- ___ Host family-friendly social events
- ___ Develop a family-school-community partnership policy
- ___ Establish policies that recognize the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the school community
- ___ Create an “open-door” policy and a responsive climate for parents
- ___ Provide translations of printed materials in all languages spoken in the school and/or hire minority language teachers
- ___ Provide interpreters for all languages spoken in the school
- ___ Provide flexible options for routine tasks that accommodate family needs
- ___ Consider varied family needs when scheduling events
- ___ Coordinate school tours and orientations for new families
- ___ Offer child care, transportation, and refreshments to encourage family involvement
- ___ Foster “total teacher commitment” to family involvement among school faculty
- ___ Maintain a parent-friendly office
- ___ Hire a family coordinator/liaison
- ___ Post welcome signs in all languages spoken in the school
- ___ Post user-friendly school maps
- ___ Reserve parking places for family visitors
- ___ Create classroom/school environments that reflect the school’s diversity
- ___ Maintain a welcoming bulletin board
- ___ Create a welcoming booklet and/or videotape for new families
- ___ Link new families with mentors
- ___ Adopt “father-friendly” practices

Strategy 2: Building a support infrastructure

- ___ Create a family center
- ___ Hire a family coordinator/liaison
- ___ Provide administrative support for family involvement activities
- ___ Devote staff time to family involvement activities
- ___ Commit resources to family involvement activities

Strategy 3: Encouraging family involvement

- ___ Hire a family coordinator/liaison to coordinate volunteer program
- ___ Take an inventory of family involvement
- ___ Involve parents in planning, implementing, and evaluating family involvement activities

- ___ Survey family and community members for prospective volunteers
- ___ Identify barriers to family involvement in your school
- ___ Acknowledge the many different ways families can be involved
- ___ Create culturally appropriate volunteer opportunities
- ___ Host an orientation program to prepare volunteers
- ___ Help volunteers feel welcome
- ___ Show appreciation for volunteers
- ___ Invite family involvement with a family-friendly letter
- ___ Host a “You Can Make a Difference” orientation to volunteer activities
- ___ Match volunteers with meaningful activities
- ___ Announce volunteer opportunities throughout the school year
- ___ Develop a screening process for potential volunteers
- ___ Provide volunteer information packets
- ___ Develop a volunteer database and directory
- ___ Encourage local businesses to support family involvement
- ___ Establish a process for evaluating the volunteer system
- ___ Involve parents in decision-making roles

Strategy 4: Developing family-friendly communication

- ___ Host neighborhood meetings
- ___ Organize neighborhood walks
- ___ Hold family focus groups
- ___ Make home visits
- ___ Host informal principal meetings
- ___ Make positive “warm” telephone calls
- ___ Exchange home/school communication
- ___ Host conferences
- ___ Communicate via newsletters
- ___ Use a variety of technology tools
- ___ Make audiotapes of written materials for families with emerging literacy
- ___ Translate all written information into families’ native languages
- ___ Develop a process for resolving family concerns

Strategy 5: Supporting family involvement on the homefront

- ___ Develop programs that involve homefront activities
- ___ Provide guidance on developmentally appropriate practices
- ___ Provide guidance on student learning
- ___ Involve parents in action research projects
- ___ Involve parents in behavioral assessments
- ___ Provide homework assistance

Strategy 6: Supporting educational opportunities for families

- ___ Conduct assessments of educational needs of families
- ___ Involve diverse parent and community members in planning
- ___ Make home visits
- ___ Offer parent workshops
- ___ Offer opportunities for parents and children to learn together
- ___ Offer opportunities for parents to develop leadership skills
- ___ Organize family support groups
- ___ Develop teen parenting programs



Strategy 7: Creating family-school-community partnerships

- ___ Bring together families, schools, and community organizations for mutual benefit
- ___ Develop comprehensive, wraparound services for families
- ___ Develop schools as community learning centers
- ___ Develop full-service schools
- ___ Cultivate school-business partnerships

Strategy 8: Preparing educators to work with families

- ___ Provide ongoing professional development in family involvement
- ___ Provide opportunities for staff, families, and community members to learn together
- ___ Imbed family involvement in preservice education programs
- ___ Include family involvement in educational policy
- ___ Make encouraging family involvement an expectation of new faculty and staff members
- ___ Include parents as teachers and faculty members
- ___ Include parental perspectives in planning and implementing professional development opportunities

Matrix of Activities

This cross-topical matrix may be used as a guide for locating information on specific topics related to family involvement within the eight “cluster strategies.” For instance, the matrix indicates that information on family involvement for students with disabilities is located in each of the eight cluster strategies; information on home-based strategies may be found in Strategies 4, 5, and 6.

Topics	Strategy 1	Strategy 2	Strategy 3	Strategy 4	Strategy 5	Strategy 6	Strategy 7	Strategy 8
School-based strategies								
Home-based strategies								
Preschool children								
Elementary students								
Middle school students								
High school students								
Students with disabilities								
Students at risk								
Homework								
Cultural diversity								
Family-friendly schools								
Family centers								
Infrastructure support								
Volunteers								
Communication								
Parent education								
Parent-child activities								
Parent support groups								
Parent leadership								
Pre-service education								
Professional development								
School-business-community partnerships								
Schools as community learning centers								
Mental health								

Strategy 1: Creating a family-friendly school environment

Action Steps:

- Establish a stakeholder group of parents and school staff to guide family-friendly development and activities
- Assess the diversity of families in your school, including diversity in race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, home language, and disability, and create a school environment that is friendly to all families
- Create a family-friendly policy or mission for the school
- Create a school environment that is welcoming to families
- Plan regular events to bring families and school staff together for positive interaction in support of learning



International Festival and “Taste of School 45”

Buffalo Public School #45,

renamed *The International School* in 2002, serves approximately 1,000 students in grades pre-K-8 who speak 29 different languages. In April of 2003 the school will collaborate with families and the community to host the school's 11th International Festival. During the festival students take the approximately 600 families and community members who attend the annual event on a “colorful journey around the world by performing cultural songs and dances” (Salinas, Jansom, & Nolan, 2001).

Planning for the annual event begins early in the school year, according to Principal Colleen Carota, and involves parents volunteering in many capacities (personal communication, August 22, 2002). Parents representative of the cultures in the school are recruited to help students develop performances from their native countries. Parents also help coordinate and prepare food for the ***“Taste of School 45”*** held the same evening in the school's cafeteria, where students and families sample treats from around the world such as Somalian sweet bread and Polish Kielbasa.

“The International School has always been a splendid example of how to bring together people from varying cultures around a common goal: providing the best education possible for their children,” said Buffalo School Superintendent Marion Canedo. “It is always very gratifying to see the many different costumes, food, languages, and traditions represented. It brings children and families together to celebrate their own culture and to learn about others. It is a unique experience and a wonderful learning opportunity for students, teachers, and families alike.”

Planning social events that bring together school faculty and staff with families in informal gatherings is one effective way to create a family-friendly school environment. Informal gatherings help educators “make connections and build relationships” with families (Lueder, 1998). Feeling welcome at school with events such as these can help encourage families to become more involved in activities to enhance their children’s learning.

Schools can try a variety of strategies to build a bridge connecting the faculty and staff with families. The message these strategies convey to parents should be: *“You are welcome, you are important to us, and we want to work with you to educate your children”* (Lueder, 1998, p. 62).

Family-friendly Schools

Henderson, Marburger, and Oom (1986) define “family-friendly” schools as those that “create a climate in which every aspect of the school is open and helpful.” Family-friendly schools strive to forge partnerships with *all* families, not just those that are most involved. Unfortunately, the opposite can also happen: school culture can marginalize families by creating an environment that discourages involvement (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, *Critical issue*, 1996).

Family-friendly Social Events

- Meet-the-teacher events
(morning and evening sessions to accommodate parent’s schedules)
- Ice cream socials
- Domino tournaments
- Dads’ Day breakfast
- Kids’ Turn to Teach Day
- Faculty/family sports and games
- Grandparents’ Day

*Families...are the most important visitors on our premises.
They are not dependent on us, we are dependent on them.
They are not an outsider in our business, they are part of it.
We are not doing them a favor by serving them, they are doing us a favor.*

**Opening Doors, Florida Partnership for Family
Involvement in Education, no date**

“Fortress” Schools

“Fortress” schools are those that do not welcome or provide outreach to families; they have inconvenient hours, unfriendly staff members, and an unwelcoming atmosphere that inhibit home-school communication and family involvement (Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999). Additionally, if the first time parents hear from a school is when there is a problem, this “lends a negative association to school involvement” and may be discouraging to parents (Aronson, 1996). Creating a family-friendly school environment means taking a close look at the building, atmosphere, policies, and activities of the school, and, with parental feedback, making sure all of these aspects are conducive to family involvement.

*Schools must become places where families feel wanted
and recognized for their strengths and potential.*

(Ballen & Moles, 1994)

Middle School Family Involvement

Family involvement often begins to decline when students reach the middle school years. Families interviewed for Giannetti and Sagarese's *The Roller-Coaster Years* (1997) indicated they felt welcomed in their children's elementary schools but felt less welcome and even "left out" once their children reached middle school (Giannetti & Sagarese, 1998, p. 40).

Building Middle School Connections

Urbana Middle School in Urbana, IL, with a student enrollment of 1,100, has implemented a number of strategies for involving middle school families. Among them are:

- *Creating a welcoming environment, including a "Community Center"*
- *Facilitating a "continuum of involvement" for family participation*
- *Encouraging parents to talk about school-related activities with their children*
- *Maintaining effective communication with families (phone calls, notes home, etc.)*
- *Maintaining a homework hotline and school information hotline*
- *Hosting three-way conferencing, including parents, teachers, and students*
- *Encouraging parents to become classroom volunteers and organizing the volunteer effort*

Community Connections coordinator Barbara Linder indicates that ten years ago there was the perception that parents were not welcome in Urbana Middle School. But once the formal parent involvement activities began and parents and teachers saw the positive benefits, participation gradually grew, and success began to "breed success." Continuing challenges for the middle school include finding the time required for teachers to build relationships with parents and involving families of at-risk students, who do not always feel welcome in school settings (Patten, 2002).

Successful middle and secondary schools recognize that "both the expectations and means of family involvement" at those levels are very different from what they were during the elementary school years (Patten, 2002).

Giannetti and Sagarese (1998) offer ten strategies to encourage family involvement at the middle school level:

1. Dust off and roll out the welcome mat.
2. Advertise your expertise.
3. Implement an early-warning system.
4. Show parents a familiar, positive portrait of their child.
5. Convey shared values.
6. Reassure parents that their child will be protected in your care.
7. Demonstrate your inside scoop (*educators may have knowledge about middle school students that parents don't have*).
8. Empathize with parents about the tough job they have.
9. Be an effective and fair disciplinarian.
10. Be a consistent role model. (p.40)

Building Family-friendly Atmospheres

Practices for creating a family-friendly atmosphere in schools include:

Family-friendly policies:

1. Developing and publicly posting a family-school-community partnership policy that provides the philosophical framework for all family-school-community activities.
2. Establishing policies and practices that “acknowledge traditional and nontraditional families” (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000) and recognize the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the school community (National PTA, Standard 2: Parenting, 2002).
3. Creating an open-door policy and climate in the school that is responsive to parents and their concerns.
4. Providing translations of printed material and making available translators for all languages spoken in the school, including sign language for hearing-impaired families.
5. Arranging for flexibility in routine tasks such as registration and orientation (on-line options, telephone options, day and evening hours, etc.) to accommodate different family needs.
6. Considering varied family needs and preferences when scheduling meetings and school events; and offering child care, transportation, and refreshments for participating families.
7. Creating an atmosphere that says, “*We respect everyone. We understand and will try to accommodate your unique needs and concerns*” (Aronson, 1996, p. 60).
8. Recognizing the special time constraints on families who have children with disabilities or who are caring for aging parents.
9. Recognizing and welcoming parents/guardians with same-gender partners.

Family-friendly faculty and staff:

1. Fostering “total teacher commitment” among administrators and teachers who believe in the value of and are experienced in family involvement, and who demonstrate respect for families and their primary role in raising children (Berger, 1995; National PTA, Standard 2: Parenting, 2002).
2. Maintaining a school office that is inviting and welcoming to visitors.
3. Maintaining a staff of school employees who are friendly and responsive to families and who reflect a “sense of family” in their “actions, beliefs, and language” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2002, p. 31).

School staff who are successful in engaging family members share the following qualities:

- They know they must have the support of parents.
- In every interaction, they demonstrate their concern for the child.
- They always treat parents the way they would like to be treated.
- They always demonstrate professionalism and confidence.

(Canter & Canter, 1991)

4. Developing the school as a “culturally competent system” staffed by individuals “whose behaviors, attitudes, and policies recognize, respect, and value the uniqueness of individuals and groups whose cultures are different from those associated with mainstream American culture” (Engiles, Fromme, LeResche, & Moses, 1999).
5. Hiring a family coordinator/liaison (voluntary or paid) responsible for connecting families and educators.
(See **Strategy 2: Building a Support Infrastructure**)
6. Hiring language and/or culture teachers who can help bridge various languages and cultures, and support families of varied backgrounds.

Family-friendly environment:

1. Posting welcome signs in all the languages spoken in the school.

Visitors are Welcome at Our School!

We are proud of our school and the overall learning process at Mountainview. We encourage parents to visit the building and to observe your child's classroom, browse through our media center or just talk to the principal about your ideas for improving our school. We request only that prior notice be given and that visitors check in at the office upon arrival.

**School Policy Statement, Mountainview Elementary
Mountainview Elementary School, Morgantown, WV**

2. Creating a classroom/school environment (pictures, books, resources, etc.) that reflects the diversity of families included in the school.
3. Maintaining a welcoming bulletin board that includes visitor information, announcements, news articles, and photographs of recent school events.
4. Creating and posting user-friendly school maps in several places throughout the school building.
5. Reserving several parking places for family visitors near the front door.

6. Providing disability access to buildings and parking areas.
7. Creating a family center where parent involvement activities are coordinated.

(See **Strategy 2: Building a Support Infrastructure**)

Ways to welcome new families:

1. Creating a welcoming booklet and/or videotape that provide helpful information to families about school policies, personnel, assistance, resources, and volunteer opportunities.
2. Coordinating school tours and orientation sessions for new families.
3. Linking new families with volunteer mentors who have children who are similar in age, cultural background, disabling condition, etc. to provide information, guidance, and support.

The Rush-Henrietta Central School District

in West Henrietta, NY, provides each new family to the district a “Welcome Folder.” The folder is full of helpful brochures and handouts describing the school district, its programs, and various community services, as well as educational and recreational opportunities for both children and their family members.

(Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000; Lueder, 1998; Hiatt-Michael, Promising Practices, 2001; Berger, 1995; Rockwell, Andrew, & Hawley, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1995; National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000).

How Father-Friendly is Your School Environment?

1. *Do faculty and staff welcome and value father involvement?*
2. *Do faculty and staff welcome the involvement of gay fathers and caregivers?*
3. *Do faculty and staff members greet fathers as they drop off and pick up their children?*
4. *Do school forms include a space where a “significant male” can be listed?*
5. *Are opportunities for involvement provided that will be of interest to fathers, grandfathers, and uncles?*
6. *Are activities planned to show fathers that they are an important part of the program and their children’s lives?*
7. *Do school posters and brochures show images of fathers as well as mothers?*
8. *Does program literature include references to both fathers and mothers, “he” as well as “she”?*
9. *Are program hours flexible so working fathers and mothers can participate?*
10. *Are suggestions for involvement solicited from fathers?*
11. *Are report cards sent to both parents to keep non-residential fathers informed?*
12. *Are male outreach workers a part of the school staff?*
13. *Are male tutors and mentors recruited by the school?*
14. *Are opportunities provided that will help fathers enhance their parenting skills through education and modeling?*
15. *Are opportunities provided to help fathers build more positive self-respect and self-esteem so that they will be empowered and feel they have something to offer their children?*
16. *Are professional development opportunities offered to the faculty and staff on father involvement?*
17. *Does the school have policies and guidelines related to working with families that include fathers?*
18. *Are mothers invited to play a role in recruitment and support for male involvement?*
19. *Are opportunities provided for father-to-father support?*
20. *Do school programs promote the idea of “cooperative parenting,” whether parents live together or separately?*

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000; Casper and Schultz, 1999)

Strategy 2: Building a support infrastructure

Action Steps:

- Commit resources to family-friendly system development
- Hire a family coordinator/liaison with a clear role and responsibilities
- Create a family center in your school – a place for activities and resources that support the family role in child development and education
- Plan for and commit resources to development of a family-friendly staff

Howard Lewis Parent Center

The Buffalo Public Schools' Howard Lewis Parent Center

in Buffalo, NY, was the first parent center in New York and one of the first in the country. Begun in 1989, the center now offers services and activities for more than 44,000 students and their families, according to Supervisor Bonnie Nelson (personal communication, August 12, 2002). The center is housed in downtown Buffalo in the Buffalo Urban League Building. It has a staff of 22, including 7 specialists in adult and early childhood education, a full-time teacher who teaches computer skills, and teaches from the public school system who serve as mathematics, reading and language specialists.

The center includes two computer labs with more than 50 computer work stations and a discovery room where a number of hands-on learning activities are offered. Additionally, the center has 60 portable computers that may be loaned to families to work together at home with their children.

Except for adult education classes and Title 1 sessions, all learning activities at the center are planned for parents and children to participate in together through the use of college tutors, computers, and family literacy activities. Core academic and other classes in areas such as art, health, exercise, sewing, and music are provided.

Transportation to the center is provided for parents through the district's school bus system. Buffalo Public School teachers may also schedule classroom visits to the center. The Parent Center is open year-round, except for school holidays, from 8 a.m.-7:30 p.m., and 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m. during the summer. In addition to this center, each school building in the district includes a parent room or parent area where families can meet or complete volunteer projects.

Rita Fraiser, Principal of the BUILD Academy, says the Howard Lewis Parent Center is valuable to the district because it *"provides a supportive environment for families."* The center also *"enables teachers to extend the learning experience of their students to help motivate and challenge them toward higher academic achievement"* (personal communication, September 12, 2002).



Encouraging family involvement in schools requires the creation of an infrastructure to support these efforts. This infrastructure typically includes developing a family center, hiring a family coordinator, and insuring ongoing resource commitments to maintain and/or expand family involvement activities.

Family centers

The Family Center is both a place and a program.

Rush-Henrietta Family Center, West Henrietta, NY

Creating family centers in school buildings and school districts is one significant way in which schools can involve families in the education of their children. Offering families a special “place of their own” in schools recognizes the “overlapping spheres of influence” that both teachers and parents share in children’s learning (Hiatt-Michael, *Promising Practices*, 2001; Johnson, 1993). Establishing family centers sends families a very positive message that they are valued as partners, belong in the school, and should feel welcome there (Lueder, 1998; Moles, 1996).

Family Support and Resource Center

Howard County Public Schools’ ***Family Support and Resource Center***, located in Columbia, MD, focuses its services on helping families of students with special needs, including fostering partnerships among parents and educators. “*We are a safe haven for parents,*” said Parent Coordinator Tonya Lewis (personal communication, Oct. 8, 2003). The center offers a variety of services for families, educators, and community members, including:

- *Learning materials for home use*
- *Individual counseling for family members*
- *Advocacy for children and families*
- *Individualized Education Program (IEP) assistance*
- *Special education information and resources*
- *Lending library of parenting resources and educational games*
- *Printed information about parenting children with special needs*
- *Educational displays*
- *Accessing community services for families*
- *Networking and support through discussion groups*
- *Training opportunities on child development, parenting skills, and understanding the special education process (Partners for success, 2003)*

Parent Sarita Bradford, a frequent center user, indicates that having a child with a disability is “*a crisis in itself,*” especially if a parent does not know where to turn for information or support. She describes the center’s services are “*awesome.*” “*It’s a comfort to know there are people I can go to who are knowledgeable, empathetic, and encouraging when I need information and support,*” she said (personal communication, October 12, 2003).

“A well-designed parent center can help a school’s learning environment in numerous ways” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Organizing*, 1996). Family centers are “accessible, safe, and friendly” places for parents to gather to share a cup of coffee and talk with other parents or teachers in a casual setting (Johnson, 2000). These centers also

serve as the “hub of information” for parents and as a primary “link” to community resources (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, *School Strategies*, 1996). Family centers are places where families can go for training, support, resources, services and even, in some centers, food, clothing, and shelter (Lueder, 1998, p. 142). The success of family centers “hinges on ownership” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Organizing*, 1996). “Parents, especially those who have not felt comfortable in school, need to feel the center belongs to them.” Family centers that welcome all family members, including children of all ages, grandparents, and other family members, display respect for “the family as a unit,” which is especially important to families with a “collectivistic value orientation” (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001, p. 43).

Planning Family Centers

Location: Family centers “come in all shapes and sizes” (Lueder, 1998, p. 143). They may be as small as a corner of the school library that houses parenting resources and as large as several rooms with multiple purposes. Many centers begin small and then expand as more resources become available (Lueder, 1998). Although most family centers serve individual schools, some larger centers serve entire districts.

Mobile Parent Resource Centers

A familiar sight in Syracuse, NY, neighborhoods is the school district’s P.U.M.P. (Power Unit for Motivating Parents) bus that reaches out to parents even in the evenings and weekends during non-winter months. Staffed by the **Syracuse School District’s** parent advocate, Michele Abdul Sabur, and three parent liaisons, the bus “*seeks out parents where it can find them*” in the community, whether at a Native American festival, a community shopping area, or outside of city hall (Abdul Sabur, personal communication, August 20, 2002). As if they were shopping in a bookstore, parents make choices for their children (infants-12th grade) as well as themselves from a variety of free, new, and diverse books. Home learning activities for various grade students and local agency information are also available. The focus of the project is to support at-home learning and assist parents to help their children meet the New York State learning standards in literacy and math.

Ms. Abdul Sabur indicated that in order to create greater awareness of the neighborhood resources available she and the staff often collaborate with community agencies to provide “*one-stop shopping*” for parents who visit the bus. “*It’s been wonderful what we’ve learned from the families, what they are looking for,*” she said. “*It really debunks the myth that people don’t care about their kids’ education*” (Nolan, 2001). Superintendent Dr. Stephen C. Jones says the P.U.M.P. bus “*is a valuable mechanism by which we have realized two vital components of our district’s Family and Community Involvement Policy — home-school communication and learning at home*” (personal communication, August 28, 2002).

The P.U.M.P. bus served more than 4,000 students and parents during the 2000-2001 school year and 4,860 during the 2001-2002 school year, according to Ms. Abdul Sabur (personal communication, August 21, 2002). The bus operates on an annual budget of approximately \$13,000, excluding donations from local bookstores.

Mobile parent centers are also operating in Virginia and California. The **Greensville County Public Schools** Mobile Parent Center serves parents in the rural Emporia, VA, area. The center includes two classrooms, various kinds of equipment, and both print and non-print parenting resources (Margaret Lee, personal communication, August 12, 2002).

The **Fresno Unified School District** operates a “*Family Center on Wheels*” that offers childhood health services, family support, and family education for preschool children and their families. The parent mobile visits neighborhood parks, businesses, and churches three days a week (Fresno Unified School District, *Parent Mobile*, 2002).

Funding: Funding is a major challenge for family centers. Most centers are funded through some combination of donations, often from business partners, community agencies, school funds, Title I funds, and fund-raising activities in support of the center. A family center does not need a large budget in the beginning. “What is more important is a firm commitment to the idea and a willingness to explore all possible sources of support” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Organizing*, 1996).

Staffing is the primary expenditure of centers, followed by resources. Business and community donations such as books, supplies, food, and equipment (refrigerators, computers, photocopy machines, etc.), as well as volunteer time from family and community members can all support the development and maintenance of family centers.

Staffing: “The center staff, whether volunteer or paid, will be the heartbeat of your family center” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Organizing*, 1996). A family center can be staffed by paid employees or volunteers, or a combination, although a full-time, paid coordinator is an asset because the position is a demanding one that requires specialized expertise, and having consistency “promotes stability and status in the position” (Johnson, 2001, p. 92). Title I funds may be used to pay the salaries of center employees, including a coordinator. Ideally, parent center coordinators should be drawn from among the families whose children attend the school.

Autonomy: Administrative support for family centers is essential, although centers need an identity of their own. Policies regarding independence and confidentiality need to be developed with parental collaboration from the beginning. Issues related to the respective roles of the administration and the family center, confidentiality, information sharing, and resolution of family-related problems need to be addressed (Donald Lash, personal communication, October 22, 2002).

Activities: The programs and services provided by family centers vary considerably from school to school. Both the scope of services to be offered and how they will be delivered need to be determined. A wide range of activities, services, and resources may be coordinated in family centers. These include:

- books, videos, and computers that parents can take home to use with their children
- a lending library of print and non-print parenting resources, such as:
 - books
 - videotapes
 - educational games
 - software
 - activity kits
- educational toys and books for visiting preschool children
- information resources, including school and community resources and services, volunteer opportunities, employment opportunities, transportation, immigration laws, voter registration, college admissions, financial aid, etc.
- child-care services
- after-school and evening tutoring programs
- parent classes and support groups
- parent-child informal education activities
- crisis intervention/family counseling, auxiliary support services such as food and clothing banks, health screenings, housing assistance, legal aid, job counseling, and transportation assistance

(Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Organizing*, 1996; Lueder, 1998; Children’s Aid Society, 2001; Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000; Hiatt-Michael, *Promising Practices*, 2001; Berger, 1995; Rockwell, Andrew, & Hawley, 1996.)

Evaluation: Evaluation of family centers should be an ongoing process focused on continual development and improvement. Types of data that may be collected and analyzed include:

- number of participants using the center
 - number of parents enrolled in classes offered at the center
 - number of volunteers
 - number of parent contacts made through the center
 - number of requests for services
 - number of referrals to the center made by school staff members and community organizations
 - evaluations of center activities and programs
 - interviews with family and community members
 - oral and written comments from participants, school staff members, and the community
- (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *How Should*, 1996)

The Rochester City School District Action Center requests that parents fill out an “exit survey,” which ensures continual feedback on center services and issues of concern to parents (Rochester City School District, 2002).

Family coordinator/liaison

The family coordinator/liaison plays a vital role in coordinating family involvement activities for the school.

The coordinator’s salary in many schools is paid through Title I funding. The coordinator’s responsibilities may include:

- planning and coordinating outreach activities to families
 - recruiting, screening, orienting, and matching parent volunteers with opportunities
 - planning and coordinating family education events
 - planning and coordinating orientation sessions for new families
 - arranging for translation services in the native language of families
 - serving as a “bridge” between families and schools
 - making home visits to families
 - producing newsletters and other communications to publicize activities
 - coordinating the evaluation of family involvement activities
- (Johnson, 2001; Moles, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, *Family Involvement*, 1997)

Resource commitment

For family involvement efforts to be effective, they need to be considered a priority by schools. Administrators must provide positive leadership to develop partnerships with families and communities and be able to translate talk into implementation, commitment, and resource allocation (Caplan, 2001). Improving family involvement may require changes in resource allocations, time commitments, and priorities. Administrators leading these efforts “will need to monitor and nurture the effort continuously” (p. 9).

*While family involvement is crucial, it is not easy to achieve.
The key ingredient of success is commitment.*

(Caplan, 2001, p. 10)

Staff time: In addition to schools needing a full-time family involvement coordinator, the school faculty and staff need to be given time and training to enable them to work effectively with families (Ballen & Moles, 1994). Support from administrators is necessary to allow team members the time to meet, plan, and conduct activities associated with family involvement (Epstein, 1995). Training is especially needed to enable faculty and staff to work effectively with the diversity of families represented in American schools today, including how to make home visits, facilitate effective Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, create a welcoming school environment, and recognize the many ways that families are involved in their children's education.

Resources: Most family involvement programs are supported by a blend of federal, state, and district funds. Federal funding is available through Title I, Title II, Title VII, Goals 2000 and other federal programs offered by the U.S. Department of Education. Another funding strategy is for school districts to offer a mini-grant program to teachers who propose and implement effective family involvement approaches in the classroom.

Epstein and Clark (2000) surveyed members of the National Network of Partnership Schools to determine current funding sources and levels for school, family, and community partnerships. Responses from 94 schools, 25 districts, and 7 states indicated that members were tapping into a variety of sources to fund family involvement programs during the 1996-97 school year, including federal funds, state and district grants, and funds from local or other organizations.

Individual school budgets to support partnership activities ranged from under \$100 to \$70,000, with an average of \$4,065. School district spending on partnership activities ranged from under \$100 to \$1.2 million, with an average of \$85,013. Funding for school partnership efforts primarily came from bilingual education, drug prevention, Even Start, Goals 2000, special education, state compensatory education, Title I, Title VI, Title VII, principals' discretionary funds, PTA/PTO, and general funds. Seven districts reported awarding grants to schools, ranging from \$1,000 to \$6,500, to support projects for school, family, and community partnerships.

Questions for Principals Concerning Family Involvement:

- How do I view the role of parents in the operation of the school and in their children's education?
- Do I talk about family partnerships? Where and when? What expectations are placed on teachers regarding partnering with parents?
- Does the school's budget include funds (preferably a line item) supporting family involvement?
- Is there a person on staff dedicated to increasing family involvement in the school?
- To what extent are parents included in school decision making? Are parents invited to curriculum meetings? School improvement planning teams? Professional development workshops?

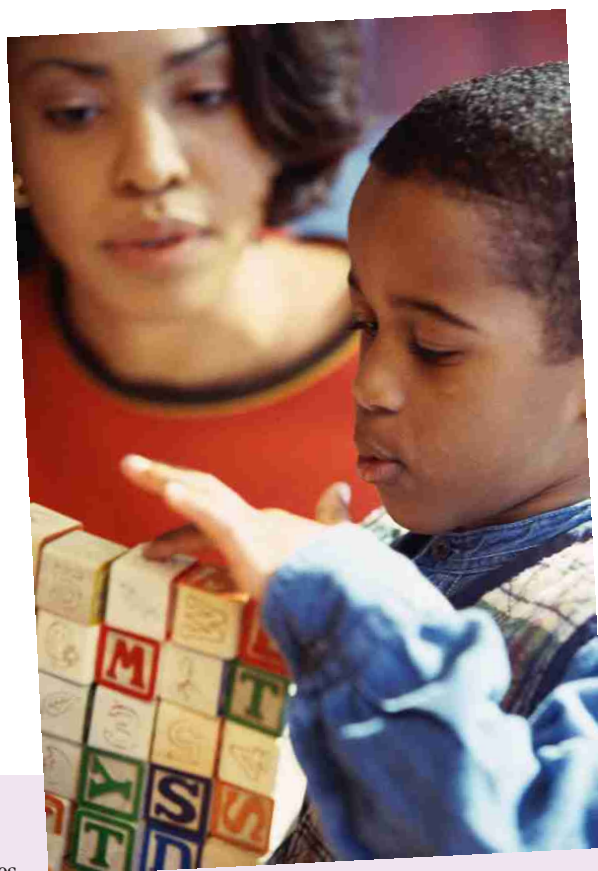
(Caplan, 2001, p.10)



Strategy 3: Encouraging family involvement

Action Steps:

- Recognize and value the many ways that families can contribute volunteer efforts, both at home and at school
- Involve parents who represent the diversity of the school population in all aspects of planning, implementing, and evaluating volunteer activities
- Include parents on all levels of involvement, from bulletin board decorating to decision making
- Show appreciation for volunteers in a variety of ways all year long



First Day of School America

The goal of the ***First Day of School America*** program is to involve families and build community support for education at the beginning of the school year. Participating schools in this nationwide initiative invite families to a variety of activities intended to welcome students and parents and build involvement (First Day Foundation, 2002). The Cohoes School District in Cohoes, NY, is one of 1,751 schools nationwide participating in the initiative, which is sponsored by the First Day of School Foundation.

In Cohoes, three public elementary schools and one Catholic school collaborated to put on the city's first First Day Celebration at the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year. The celebration was held in a city park centrally located to the four schools, according to Barbara Hildreth, Principal of Harmony Hill School and Chairperson of the First Day Committee (personal communication, August 26, 2002). "We were in awe," she said. "The park was mobbed" as more than 1,500 of the blue collar town's 16,000 students, parents, and community members joined Clifford the Big Red Dog, a local radio station, George and Harry Hippopotamus, Ronald McDonald, the high school band, and the local police department's bike safety team to mingle informally and welcome the new school year. After the mayor proclaimed the official opening of the school year, the students marched with their classmates back to their respective schools. The PTA served coffee to parents at each school. Those with younger students were invited to stay for reading-with-your-child workshops, while parents of older students were invited to workshops on how to effectively help their children with homework (Two New First Day Firsthand Stories, 2002).

The 2002-2003 school year First Day celebration included not only the morning celebration at the park but also an evening event for parents unable to participate in the morning at the high school. This event included a book swap, a magic show, and "make-your-own" ice cream sundaes (personal communication, August 26, 2002)

Planning for this event, which the district intends to make an annual celebration, begins in January and is coordinated by a committee that includes parents and educators from each participating school. According to parent Mary Rumsey, First Day "promotes parental involvement and character education that last long into the school year," and unites parents from the community's four schools (personal communication, January 29, 2003).

Ms. Hildreth noted that the celebration "allows the entire community to celebrate the opening of a new school year, which reminds everyone how important learning is" (personal communication, August 26, 2002).

The Quilting Project

Students attending **Galena Middle School in Galena, MD** combine academic and vocational skills as they collaborate in an annual ***Quilting Project*** that involves families, community members, and teachers (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2002). Students learn measuring, geometric concepts, sewing skills, and positive social skills as they make 20-30 quilts per year to donate to hospital patients. Family members assist students by donating items and assisting with sewing of the quilts, each quilt requiring 10-25 hours to complete. To enhance the project, the school has created a web page to help students learn more about quilting, its history, and its connection with math.

The Quilting Project and First Day of School America Activity are examples of successful projects that encourage volunteer involvement by bringing together families, educators, students, and community members. To be successful today, volunteer opportunities in schools must recognize the diverse needs and preferences of family members who may be involved in the education of children (Lian & Fontanez-Phelan, 2001). Acknowledging that family members do not have to be in the school building to volunteer, and beginning with the assumption that families are already involved in the lives of their children are ways to broaden the appeal of volunteering (Thorp, 1997; Edwards, Fear, & Gallego, 1995; Lewis, 1992).

Offering a variety of volunteer opportunities that have varied time commitments and can be done at different times by mothers, fathers, guardians, and other family members — both in school and at home — and acknowledging varying levels of participation as positive contributions to the school can help to build interest. Studying the cultural diversity of the school's population and collaborating with families to create a variety of culturally appropriate opportunities for volunteering (such as language interpreters or parent mentors, for example) also are effective ways to build interest.

Making family members who volunteer feel welcome to join their children for lunch or providing coffee and donuts in the family center helps family members feel valued and comfortable at school. Enthusiasm for the program can be fostered by showing appreciation for volunteers in a variety of ways (volunteer appreciation events, newsletter articles, thank you notes, etc.) and by valuing their diverse contributions throughout the year.

*When parents become involved, children do better in school,
and they go to better schools.*

Anne T. Henderson
Author of *A New Wave of Evidence*

Quitman Street Community School in Newark, NJ, uses family-school contracts to ensure families contribute volunteer time. Every parent who has a child participating in the after-school program is invited to sign a contract to volunteer in the school at least 6 hours during the year. More than 2,500 volunteer parent hours were donated in 2000; during 2001, 12 parents were employed as part-time group leaders, youth counselors, and aides in the after-school program. Five of these parents were subsequently hired to serve as full-time teachers' aides during the school day (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002).

Strategies for building an effective volunteer system:

Developing an infrastructure to support family involvement

1. Create a family center where volunteer activities are coordinated by a paid or volunteer coordinator.
(See ***Strategy 2: Building an Infrastructure***)

Planning a volunteer program

1. Take a current inventory of the ways in which families are involved in the school through an informal survey (online, paper, or telephone), parent interviews, focus groups, or a combination of these methods.
2. Involve parent volunteers who represent the diversity of the school population in planning family-oriented activities and events; seek their input, suggestions, and assistance. Utilize organized parent groups such as PTAs and PTOs to recruit family members.
3. With family input, identify barriers to volunteering such as child care, transportation, work schedules, language differences, etc., and work with family members to find creative solutions.

Recruiting volunteers

1. Survey family and community members to identify individuals who are willing to volunteer. The National PTA (*Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000) has developed a parent survey that can be used or adapted. *Essentials for Principals: Strengthening the Connection between School and Home* (2001) includes both a Teacher and Staff Survey (pp. 19-20) and a Parent Survey (English version, pp. 23-24 and Spanish version, pp. 65-66) that can be used as starting points for developing or improving volunteer programs.
2. Send out a family-friendly letter at the beginning of the school year inviting parent involvement (see the sample from Mountainview Elementary School, Morgantown, WV, on page 49). *Essentials for Principals: Strengthening the Connection between School and Home* (2001) also includes sample letters from principals to parents (p. 68) and teachers to parents (p. 69).
3. Host a “How You Can Make a Difference” orientation for potential family and community volunteers at the beginning of each school year.
4. Match volunteers with activities that are meaningful to them and build on their interests and abilities.
5. Use school and community resources throughout the school year to announce volunteer opportunities.

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the start of a new school year at *Mountainview Elementary*, where a great part of our success stems from cooperation and help from parents. Now is your chance to become involved.

If you've never been a parent volunteer before, please join us. There really is something for everyone. Whether you enjoy working with large groups of children, tutoring individual students, or providing clerical support, we need you! The rewards of volunteering are numerous for you and the children.

If you have volunteered in previous years, welcome back. You provided more than 4000 hours of service to Mountainview students, faculty, and staff last year. Every minute made a difference. The staff and faculty thank you for this effort and dedication.

Please take a few moments of your valuable time to review the attached Parent VolunteerForm. Indicate your area(s) of interest, and preferred day(s) and time(s) and return the completed form to your child's homeroom teacher by August 30. Brief orientation meetings will be held on September 19 at 9:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. At this meeting a description of the needs of the teachers will be available. I will also discuss how the parent volunteer program works.

Remember that no matter how small a job may seem to you, it's a big help to our school. Please feel free to contact me at 296-8488 if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions regarding Mountainview's Parent Volunteer Program.

Very truly yours,

Sandy Martin
Parent Volunteer Coordinator
Mountainview Elementary School

Developing a volunteer program

1. Develop a process for screening potential volunteers to ensure the safety and security of the school's population.
2. Host an orientation program to prepare volunteers for their assignments and to acquaint them with school procedures.
3. Provide each volunteer with a "Volunteer Information Packet" of helpful information, including a welcome letter, list of benefits of volunteering, building map, parking information, sign in/out policies, accident procedures, and directions on where to go for supplies, etc.
4. Provide training to volunteers on important issues such as confidentiality.

5. Develop a volunteer database and distribute a directory (school “Yellow Pages”) of volunteer interests/talents/availability to all school personnel for easy access.

Soliciting community support

1. Recruit community members as school volunteers to work with family members.
2. Encourage local businesses and employers to help by allowing employees paid release time and/or flexible working hours to volunteer and/or participate in activities at school.

Evaluating the volunteer program

1. Establish a process for volunteers to sign in and out so that there is a record of volunteer time.
2. Conduct ongoing evaluations of the volunteer system, and with input from parents revise as needed. (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000; National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, *Fathers Matter*, 1997; Berger, 1995; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *How Should*, 1996; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, *School Strategies*, 1996; Epstein, 2001).

Family involvement in decision making

When family and community members are involved in decision-making and advocacy, they feel more deeply invested in the school and more empowered. Schools benefit from the feedback and different points of view provided by family and community members. Involved family and community members can help promote public understanding and support for the school. They can also play an advocacy role for the school with the community and local government (Sullivan, 1998; Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000).

The Comer School Development Program attributes its success in more than 640 School Development Program (SDP) schools nationwide to the involvement of parents (Noblitt, Malloy, & Malloy, 2001). The program includes three teams, the School Planning and Management Team, the Parent Team, and the Student and Staff Support Team, that involve parents, teachers and administrators, as well as other stakeholders in planning, decision-making, and problem solving issues concerning the school. Studies have indicated that the SDP had positive effects on school climate, which, in turn, correlated with positive student outcomes, including improved achievement, attendance, behavior, attitudes and self-concept, and school climate (Comer, 1988; Comer & Haynes, 1992).

At **Monica Leary Elementary School** in the **Rush-Henrietta School District** in Rush, NY, has “parent representation on every major committee” (personal communication, August 20, 2002). According to principal Sue Mills, this representation includes the Space Study Committee, which has addressed such issues as opening and closing schools, locating space for new programs, and redrawing boundary lines. The support of this committee was instrumental in opening a second middle school in the district and proposing a bond issue to open a new elementary school. Another example is the Budget Advisory Committee, which has addressed fiscal issues such as sources of revenue, state aid, and property taxes. This committee works closely with the assistant superintendent of schools and makes recommendations to the district’s board of education (Salinas, Jansom, & Nolan, 1998).

As a parent, I feel it is imperative that parents are given, and take advantage of, the opportunity to be involved on major school district committees. Parents bring a unique perspective to a group that is making decisions that will directly impact their children.

(Patricia A. St. Clair, personal communication, January 28, 2003)

The Middle School Achievement Project

In an effort to involve family and community members in middle school reform efforts in the **Minneapolis School District**, the **League of Women Voters** coordinated the Middle School Achievement Project (Clark & Clark, 2003).

The project had three major goals:

1. Promote higher standards by observing current instructional practices in middle grades classrooms
2. Increase parental involvement in middle schools
3. Be a catalyst for citywide reform of middle level education

The League recruited more than 100 parents and community members as “shadowers” for the project. Following a training session, each shadower observed a middle-level student or teacher for an entire day, recorded field notes, and wrote reflections that were later analyzed. Additionally, shadowers interviewed students, teachers, and principals using a structured interview procedure. During a confidential debriefing session, shadowers shared experiences and concerns. Major findings of the study included:

1. Parents and community members became more involved in middle level schools.
2. Educators were given valuable information concerning issues such as the nature of interactions, program implementation, curriculum, instructional strategies, and student engagement in learning.
3. Community members gained insight about middle-level students and school.

With the information generated by the project, the League of Women Voters was able to assume a leadership role in a comprehensive, citywide middle school reform effort.

Minneapolis Deputy Superintendent commented on the program: *“We value and respect the perspectives of parent observers in our schools. Parents are greatly invested in our success as they have committed a large portion of the lives of their children to us. The data collected by the Middle School Achievement Project enabled the district to move its reform agenda forward more rapidly. Thus the Project resulted in a win-win situation for many stakeholders.”*

Special Education Parent Advisory Councils

One of the most effective ways to involve parents of students with disabilities is to form a Special Education Parent Advisory Council. “An active and effective special education parent advisory council can be a true asset to a school district by providing parent involvement and input on special education issues,” including disability law, understanding of different disabilities, assistive technology, transition, and other topical areas (Alaska Parents, Inc., *School Administrator’s Guide*, no date). **The Howard County Public School System** in Maryland has an active **Special Education Citizens’ Advisory Committee** that is dedicated to educating parents, teachers, and the community on special education issues. “By identifying unmet needs of students, parents, and the many professionals who work with them, the committee advocates for constructive change and the supports that are necessary to provide quality educational opportunities for all students” (Howard County School District, no date).

Strategies for involving families in decision-making roles include:

- Developing a team to address issues that need family-school discussion and cooperation
- Conducting family focus groups to discuss critical issues
- Seeking out parent perspectives by conducting mini-surveys
- Including diverse family members on decision-making and advisory committees
- Providing training for parents on how to access, interpret, and use data to promote school reform
- Providing training for school faculty, staff, and family members on collaboration and shared decision making
- Involving family and community members in the school improvement planning process
- Treating family concerns with respect, and actively working to demonstrate a sincere interest in seeking resolutions to concerns voiced by family and community members

(Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Sullivan, 1998; Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, *Organizing*, 1996; Lopez, 2002)

Tips on Creating and Using Parent Surveys

1. *Determine what it is you want to find out from parents.*
2. *Translate surveys into parents' native languages.*
3. *Keep language simple and free of jargon.*
4. *Minimize open-ended questions. Multiple-choice questions increase response rates.*
5. *Assure parents that surveys are anonymous, unless they choose to sign to sign their names.*
6. *Inform parents ahead of time when to expect the survey.*
7. *Enlist teachers, students, and parents to disseminate and collect the surveys.*
8. *Allow only one response per family.*
9. *Involve school personnel and parents in the interpretation of data and development of an appropriate plan.*
10. *Provide feedback on survey results to school staff and parents.*

(Aronson, 1996, p.60)

Volunteer opportunities at school:

Constructing and maintaining playground equipment

Planting flowers, trees, shrubs, etc.

Assisting in coordination of service learning projects in the community

Conducting parent trainings

Facilitating parent support meetings

Mentoring/tutoring students

Reading stories to students or listening to students read

Assisting with teacher appreciation activities

Decorating bulletin boards

Greeting and welcoming visitors

Staffing the family center

Assisting in coordinating a resource lending library

Offering language translation services

Accompanying students on field trips

Acting as “Teacher for a Day” to share a special interest or expertise with students

Working in after-school programs

Serving on decision-making and advisory committees

(Sources: U.S. Department of Education, *Bringing*, 1999; Mental Health, *Welcoming*, 1997; Clemens-Brower, 1997; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, *School Strategies*, 1996; Sullivan, 1998)

Volunteer opportunities at home:

Assisting with writing, design, and publication of school notices, newsletters, and other publications

Writing letters/thank you notes

Making telephone calls to other parents

Recruiting/coordinating volunteers

Designing and/or making costumes

Constructing instructional games

Fundraising

Providing child care

Hosting parent meetings

Serving as peer mentors for new parents

Designing web sites

Repairing equipment

Translating school information into families' native languages

(Sources: U.S. Department of Education, *Bringing*, 1999; Mental Health, *Welcoming*, 1997; Clemens-Brower, 1997; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, *School Strategies*, 1996; Sullivan, 1998)

Strategy 4: Developing family-friendly communication

Action Steps:

- Communicate with families often and in a variety of ways
- Use culturally appropriate ways to relate to the diversity of families represented in the school
- Choose communication strategies that encourage two-way interactions
- Reach out to communicate with families who rarely attend school activities



Neighborhood Meetings

When Dr. John Metallo was superintendent of the rural Fort Plain Central School District in eastern New York, he realized that in order to encourage more family involvement in school, especially among parents who were reluctant to come to the school building, “*We needed to get the show on the road*” (personal communication, August 16, 2002). He began a tradition of neighborhood meetings to reach out to families, which continued for the five years he served there.

The neighborhood meetings, held monthly during the evenings, were inviting to parents because the settings were more comfortable and less intimidating than the school for many parents (Dietz, *School, Family*, 1997). Although most of the meetings were held in the homes of volunteer host parents, several were held in neighborhood churches and senior citizens centers. Each meeting attracted 10-14 parents.

School personnel attended the meetings in teams, according to Dr. Metallo, and focused the theme of each meeting on the concerns of parents who were attending and the ages of their children. Following an introductory overview by team members, the meeting facilitator would offer everyone an opportunity to ask questions on topics that ranged from the district budget to class size to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Then the host would provide refreshments and there would be an opportunity for informal conversations among parents and the school team members. These opportunities allowed parents to “*see that we were real people*,” said Dr. Metallo, “*and that we shared a lot of the same values*” (personal communication, August 16, 2002).

Dr. Metallo views neighborhood meetings as one effective strategy for schools to be more “user friendly” for parents. “*The more accessible we can be, the better*,” he said (personal communication, August 16, 2002).

Neighborhood Walks in Wichita, KS

Colvin Elementary School in Wichita, KS, is located in a high poverty, diverse community that includes families who speak a variety of languages but do not necessarily know how to navigate the school system (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2002). In order to “*break down the walls between the home and school*” and help these families feel welcomed and needed their community school, Colvin staff reach out to families utilizing a variety of communication strategies.

One of these strategies is to walk through the school neighborhood and knock on doors, to meet families and distribute informational flyers before the school year begins. “*It lets families know we care,*” said principal Karen Boettcher.

Each family receives eight positive, face-to-face communications about their school during each school year. Additionally, staff serve coffee every Friday morning in the school driveway in order to greet parents. Parent handbooks have been made available in video format in five different languages, translators are available on site to assist parents, and a parent room is open each day as a site for networking, parent education, and adult education.

Neighborhood meetings and walks are two of many effective strategies to communicate with families and build stronger school-family relationships. Communication often serves as the first step to developing other types of parental involvement (Elman, 1999). The more opportunities for personal contact through meetings such as these, “the stronger the bonds that link home and school” (Hiatt-Michael, 2001, *Promising Practices*, p. 41). In addition to administrators and teachers, school board members can also host neighborhood meetings and meet face to face with family members in order to get to know families in the school community they serve and address their concerns.

Good communication between teachers and parents increases trust (Adams and Christenson, 2000) and encourages realistic expectations for children by keeping parents and teachers “on the same page” (Drake, 2000; James, Jurich, & Estes, 2001).

To be effective, home-school communication needs to be “consistent, two-way and meaningful” (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000), using a variety of forms, both formal and informal, conveying both bad news and good, on a regular basis (Whitaker & Fiore, 2001; Power, 1999). Anne Henderson, author of *A New Generation of Evidence* (1994), recommends that schools make contact with *every family every month* by such means as parent-teacher conferences, telephone calls, e-mails, home visits, or “quick chats” after school. She suggests that all teachers should have cell phones and/or all classrooms have telephone lines (Jones, 2001).

Rich (1998) acknowledges that it is more difficult to communicate with parents as students grow older. In kindergarten, children can “wear” notes home. In elementary school, notes can be attached to school menus. At the secondary level it becomes more difficult to reach parents. She recommends that teachers have parents’ work phone numbers and addresses and be “accessible and responsive” when parents call or want to meet (pp. 38-39). Some care must be taken in using families’ work numbers, however, as in some cases calls at work may not be allowed or employees may not have the privacy to speak freely about sensitive issues.

We began to make real headway when we stopped assuming we knew what our parents felt, wanted, or hoped for their children. Only when we began to sincerely listen did we really hear.

Dryfoos and Maguire, 2002

Communicating with culturally diverse families. All communication should be in the native language of parents and respectful of cultural variations. The personal approach to reaching out to parents is especially important in diverse communities (Kelty, 1997). **The Hispanic Policy Development Project** found that written communication and radio and television announcements were largely ineffective with Hispanic parents, even when they were translated into Spanish, and that “The only successful approach is personal: face-to-face conversations with parents in their primary language in their homes” (Inger, 1992, p. 132). From an analysis of family involvement in 42 school/parent projects, the HPDP concluded that “overcoming the barriers between schools and Hispanic parents does not require large amounts of money; it does require personal outreach, nonjudgmental communication, and respect for parents’ feelings” (p. 133).

Family coordinators can serve as an effective communication bridge between culturally diverse parents and the school. In Austin, TX, **Ridgetop Elementary School** parent support specialist Maria Teresa Flores meets with parents, who speak limited English, either individually or in small groups before they meet with teachers or principals in order to help them understand the system and what questions to ask (Rothstein, 2002). Ms. Flores works to empower parents by using a variety of methods, including role playing (personal communication, September 22, 2002).

Parent Information Booth

*The **Arminta Elementary School** Site Action Team in North Hollywood, CA, discovered a creative way to increase parent attendance at workshops and activities. The team created a Parent Information Booth as a way to disseminate information about opportunities (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2002). The Site Action team selected the information to be made available in the booth, including flyers about school workshops, community activities, and parenting classes. The Parent Information Booth consisted of several tables decorated with welcoming signs in English and Spanish, balloons, and poster displays of events. Team members and community representatives rotated coverage of the booth, which was present at all major school events. The consistency of the booth’s presence at these school functions helped family and community members gain information in a family-friendly setting.*

Communicating with parents of students with disabilities. When parents have a child with a disability, “it is imperative that a trusting relationship is built between the family and the teacher(s). Partnerships can be built upon an openness to information shared with the family and a sensitivity to the changing needs and concerns within each family system” (Rockwell, Andrew, & Hawley, 1996, p. 85). It is very important that school districts provide information to parents about services available to their child, and their rights as parents, as soon as the child is identified as having a disability. Otherwise, as one parent expressed it, “You’re sort of left out there hanging,” feeling lost at a time when information, support, and guidance are most needed (Lake, 2000). Developing good communication and building a relationship based upon trust helps strengthen home-school support for children with disabilities and diminishes the potential for conflicts.

In a 2000 survey of parents of students with disabilities, parents indicated that discrepant views of their children or children’s needs create the majority of home-school conflicts (Lake, 2000). Parents were frustrated when they felt the school did not

view their children as unique individuals with strengths and abilities and demonstrated a limited understanding of their children's overall needs. Parents were also saddened when school personnel consistently described their children from a "deficit-model perspective," emphasizing what their children could not do instead of what they were capable of doing. To avoid conflicts such as these, educators and parents need to communicate, so that educators are able to see that the disability is only *part* of the child. "This sharing of parent and school perspectives and viewing of the child as a whole person provides a firm foundation for good parent-school partnerships (Lake, 2000).

We have found that by establishing a positive relationship with our daughters' teachers or case managers and communicating regularly, we can solve problems quickly when they occur. Effective ongoing parent and teacher communication is the key to ensuring that our children will be successful in school.

Bob Brick, Families and Advocates Partnership for Education, Minneapolis, MN

When communicating with parents of children with disabilities, there are many ways that teachers can be supportive, responsive, and resourceful. These include:

- recognizing the family as an invaluable source of information about their children;
- practicing active listening;
- providing comprehensive, accurate, and up-to-date information about the child's disability and related issues
- assisting parents as they learn to navigate the education system;
- providing information about services and benefits available to the family;
- providing emotional support for the family;
- conveying the value of the child to parents;
- having the ability to "put yourself in the shoes of the parent";
- challenging stereotypes about parents;
- persevering in building partnerships;
- demonstrating interest in parents' goals for their children;
- talking with parents about how they want to share information;
- developing effective ways for planning and problem solving that honor parent needs and preferences;
- learning and supporting the family's decision-making process, even if the teacher may disagree with decisions made;
- expanding cultural diversity awareness;
- conveying assessment and evaluation information with sensitivity and empathy;
- advocating for the family across school and community agencies; and
- linking families who have children with similar disabilities

(Hornby, 2000; Muscott, 2002; O'Shea, O'Shea, Algozzine, & Hammitte, 2001; Davern, 1996; Smith & Smith, 2003).

When we respect parents as partners in their children's learning, the lines of communication between home and school are strengthened, and we as teachers are not quite so alone in our efforts to educate children.

(Power, Strengthen, 1999, p.31)

In addition to neighborhood meetings and walks, communication strategies that have proven effective in building personal connections with families include family focus groups, home visits, informal principal meetings, positive "warm" telephone calls, home-school notes, conferences, newsletters, technology tools, and processes for resolving family concerns.

Family focus groups

For families who are not comfortable coming to school, or cannot come because of transportation or child care barriers, family focus group sessions can be held in neighborhood homes, community centers, churches, businesses, or even fast-food restaurants. During these sessions educators can learn about family needs, concerns, and culture, and can help parents feel more connected to the school. Educators planning these meetings should be sensitive to family needs concerning location and times (Lueder, 1998). Providing child care enables more parents to attend.

Home visits

Benefits of home visits. Home visits are a “very powerful mechanism” for teachers to connect with families (Swap, 1993, p. 125) and a concrete demonstration of their “concern, caring, and commitment” to families (Lueder, 1998, p. 79). These visits allow teachers to understand their students better by seeing families in their home environment (Moles, 1996). In addition, two major barriers to family involvement — child care and transportation — are removed by home visits. Home visits also may be more comfortable for many parents, especially if there are cultural barriers or negative past experiences associated with going to the school building.

Home visits are most effective when made before the school year begins to establish relationships with families. Visits may also be made during the school year to continue building relationships and to work individually with families. If families speak different languages, outreach efforts to non-English speaking families should be made by individuals who speak their language and know the culture (Lueder, 1998). Blank and Kershaw (1998) have developed a Parent Information and Interest Inventory and guidelines that may be used as a starting point for planning home visits.

I believe this time (making home visits) is the best investment I can make in my students and their families. The partnership is founded so early. We begin working together before the first bell rings, and I believe this personal introduction helps to alleviate the anxieties of all those involved: the students, their parents, and me. The first day of school is more like a reunion, and a very happy one at that.

**Lori Woods, Teacher, Greenbrook Elementary School,
New Jersey (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p.198)**

School staff members conducting home visits may require training in order to relate effectively with families. In many districts teachers who make home visits have their teaching schedules adjusted so that they are given the necessary time to make visits. In some school districts home visiting is built into teacher contracts as a responsibility (Swap, 1993). Some schools have used federal Title 1 or Chapter 1 funds to hire home-school liaisons who coordinate the home visitation program as well as make home visits themselves.

Home visits to families of children with disabilities. Many parents with children who have disabilities have difficulty attending school-based functions because of the intensive needs of their children. Home visits allow these parents to connect with teachers while caring for their children and sharing information about how they can work together to best meet their children’s educational needs. Additionally, home visits can serve as informal pre-planning meetings for annual Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). For a child with multiple special needs, visits might involve a team of educators who have specialized training in areas such as physical therapy, speech therapy, or occupational therapy. Families of different cultures have varying interpretations and attitudes toward disabling conditions; home visits allow teachers to learn more about the cultural perspective of the family toward the child’s disability (Research Identifies, 2001).

Disadvantages of home visits. Home visits have disadvantages as well. To plan, schedule, and make home visits is very time consuming for educators. Some families may regard home visits as an intrusion, and their privacy and boundary needs must be honored (Singer & Powers, 1993). Other families who live in poverty may be embarrassed to have teachers visit their homes. Home visits in high crime neighborhoods or rural areas can also be potentially dangerous. Visiting in teams and carrying cell phones for emergencies help ensure safety (Rockwell, Andrew, & Hawley, 1996).

Informal principal meetings

Principals who make themselves available to families on a regular basis invite positive, two-way school-home communication and build bridges with families. The climate of these informal meetings, held during either morning or evenings hours, “can be an essential element in maintaining positive home-school relations throughout the year” (Robbins and Alvy, 1995, p. 210). These meetings can also serve as a forum to gain parent input on hot issues and let parents know that their opinions are valued.

At Ridgetop Elementary School in Austin, TX, Principal Julie Pryor meets parents for an informal potluck breakfast every Friday morning. Parents are invited to talk about any issues of concern to them, which can range from adjustment for new students to cafeteria menus. The informal meeting attracts about 35 parents weekly, according to parent support coordinator Maria Teresa Flores (personal communication, September 22, 2002).

Positive “warm” telephone calls

In most instances the only time parents receive a telephone call from their child’s school is when there is a problem. The intent of a positive “warm” telephone call, in contrast, is to “establish or strengthen a two-way communication flow and to build the collaborative relationship between the family and the school” (Lueder, 1998, p. 105). Positive calls “can go a long way in fostering a sense of commitment to the student and to ongoing communications with the family (rather than communications that occur only when problems arise)” (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). In addition to welcoming parents, these calls can convey the importance of information sharing, provide contact information, invite parents to school events, give parents an opportunity to ask questions, and enable teachers to learn more about individual students (Gustafson, 1998).

In addition to making positive phone calls, former Missouri junior high principal Dr. Todd Whitaker also sent “positive postcards” home to parents. These served as an effective way to praise students for positive accomplishments and to “enhance positive relations with all parents in the school” (Whitaker & Fiore, 2001). Postcards were “doubly appropriate” for students whose families did not have telephones. Although Whitaker had doubts when the school first started sending the postcards, these were quickly alleviated:

“I’ll never forget that years after some students went through our school I could go into their homes, and every postcard they ever received from our staff was still prominently posted on the family refrigerator. And I do believe that having parents think positive thoughts about you and your school every time they get out the milk is probably very beneficial in establishing the relationship that you would like.” (p. 61)

When school staff members do need to contact family members with concerns, positive communication strategies should be used to connect with families. These strategies include conveying the desire to work together to help the child, using the family’s own language or a translator, not talking “above” family members, listening to the family member’s perspective and valuing his/her input, asking the family member for help, and thanking the family member for “listening, caring, and helping” (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Moles, 1996).

Home-school notes/notebooks

Communication can be sustained by a variety of parent-friendly formats that invite two-way interaction (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, *Critical Issue*, 1996). For example, special folders can be used to send home student work and school notices each week; the folder can include a place for parent comments to encourage two-way communication (National PTA, *Standard 1: Communicating*, 2000).

Fayetteville Elementary School in Fayetteville, NY, has adopted a brightly colored, easily identified, parent-friendly, bound notepad for the past three years to encourage two-way communication between home and school. Fayetteville Elementary Principal Nancy Smith says her staff “views the form as a simple practice that facilitates home-school communication and sends a message to parents that we realize their time is valuable and that we want to assist them with following school procedures” (personal communication, August 20, 2002).

Home-school interactive notebooks, or message journals, are an effective way for parents and teachers to maintain communication (National PTA, 2000). These journals can be beneficial not only to communicate to families what their children are learning at school, but also to help students “integrate their understandings” of what they are learning while improving their writing skills (Wollman-Bonilla, 2000; Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, & Moore, 2002).

Home-school notebooks are also an effective way to communicate with families of children with disabilities who may be unable to communicate important information to their families. Notebooks travel back and forth between home and school carrying messages about accomplishments, concerns, needs, and assignments. Parents and teachers communicating with interactive notebooks should decide together how frequently to write, who will write, what kinds of information will be shared, and who will have access to the journal (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997).

Conferences

School conferences, scheduled periodically throughout the school year, allow families to communicate face-to-face and individually with teachers concerning their children’s academic progress at a time and location that is convenient to their needs. If parents cannot come to school, they may be able to participate through conference calls or other technological means. Berger (1995) offers a Conference Checklist (p. 199) which may be used to evaluate the effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences.

Mobile Conferences

Giancarlo Mercado, who characterizes herself as a “community style teacher,” teaches several students in the Los Angeles School District who are bused across town to Venice from East Hollywood. To make conferences more convenient for these parents, Ms. Mercado makes arrangements to meet parents in their neighborhood schools for conferences three times yearly. “Yes, it takes effort,” she said, “but they (the parents) are making an effort, too. And I can’t think of what our relationship would be like if I didn’t meet them halfway.”

(Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001, p. 71)

Student-led Parent-Teacher Conferences. Student-led parent-teacher conferences encourage both students and parents to actively participate in the educational process. Schools that used student-led conferences found that parent attendance rates were higher than with traditional parent-teacher conferences (Hackmann, 1996; Little & Allan, 1989; Borba & Olvera, 2001). The student-led conference enables students to reflect on the school curriculum and their own learning (Kyle, McIntyre, Miller, & Moore, 2002), communicate with both teachers and parents about their learning experiences, assume more direct “ownership of their learning” (Borba & Olvera, 2001), and “see themselves as capable of participating in the assessment process as reflective learners” (Austin, 1994, p. 90).

With sufficient preparation and support, students with disabilities from age 14, or sometimes even younger, can be active participants in planning their Individualized Education Program (IEP). With training in self-determination skills, these students may participate in and even lead their own IEP meetings, including the development of their individualized transition plan (McGahee, Mason, Wallace, & Jones, 2001; Warger & Burnette, 2000).

IEP Conferences. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) mandates that “schools provide an opportunity for active parental participation in decisions about the education of children” (Smith, 2001), including the development of Individualized Education Plans (IEP). In fact, family involvement is considered a “necessary ingredient for appropriate and individualized educational programming” (Smith, 2001). One of the many benefits of family involvement in the IEP process is improved communication between parents and the school (Smith, 2001).

Much has been written about how to conduct IEP meetings that maximize parent participation. The following are a few suggestions for how school staff might prepare for an IEP meeting (Peter, 1992):

- Tell parents why parent involvement is crucial and what will happen at the meeting
- Invite parents to bring anyone they wish
- Explain who will attend from the school district and why; ask parents if anyone has been left out
- Schedule a convenient time and location, and ample time for the meeting
- Find out if parents need help with transportation or childcare
- Invite parents to review relevant documents prior to meeting and encourage classroom visits

To promote the family partnership envisioned by IDEA, teachers should meet the child’s family to obtain information at the beginning of the year and maintain contact throughout the year to report progress and solve problems collaboratively via communication notebooks, phone calls, e-mail messages, and/or face-to-face meetings (Beckman, 2001).

Parents who work collaboratively with schools provide educators the necessary tools to value their child as a learner, a student, and as a human being.

**Cassandra Archie, Advocates for Educational Equity,
Rochester, NY**

Newsletters

School and classroom newsletters can provide a steady stream of information from school to home. Brief newsletters that are informative and sent to families on a regular basis are more likely to be read than longer newsletters that are printed occasionally (Power, *Parent Power*, 1999). Newsletters can include interactive features that allow for two-way communication, including columns written by family and community members and mini-surveys inviting family responses. They may also include suggested learning activities that involve family members. Family volunteers can work on newsletters at home or at school assisting with the writing, design, desktop publishing, and dissemination.

Technology tools

A variety of technology tools may be utilized to effectively and efficiently communicate with families. Many schools have developed and maintain World Wide Web sites that include a wealth of information for families. Some districts have developed Internet-based, home-school communication programs where families can access student and school information such as daily grade reports, attendance reports, individual class web pages, class newsletters and reports, and school information and calendars (Imelli & Purvis, 2000; Nixon, 2002). Including a special link to information of interest to parents (family center hours, family involvement policy, upcoming workshops, volunteer opportunities, homework hotline, etc.) is a family-friendly way to make information readily available.

The **Rush-Henrietta Central School District** in New York has created a family-friendly school calendar on its web site, which may be accessed by month, school, or category. This resource allows parents to access information about district-wide events for the entire school year or to narrow their search, for example, to upcoming family center events and school parent group activities in a particular school during a given month of the year (Rush-Henrietta Central School District, 2002). The **Paideia School** in Atlanta, GA, has developed a web site (<http://www.paideiaschool.org>) that includes an extensive listing of parent organizations and events as well as an online parent involvement interest form.

Teachers are also using e-mail messages and list serves to maintain two-way communication with families. However, since not all families have Internet access, teachers need to communicate with families in a variety of ways. Publicizing the availability of school computer labs for family use during non-school hours is helpful for families who do not have computers at home, as are computer lending libraries for families (Power, *Parent Power*, 1999).

Many schools are now wiring classrooms for telephones at the same time that they are wiring for Internet access, giving teachers telephones in their classrooms for the first time (Zehr, 1999). The introduction of this technology in the classroom, which many educators feel is long overdue, represents yet another avenue for teachers to communicate with family members, both directly and indirectly. Utilizing the “Transparent School” model, parents can leave messages for teachers, and an autodialing system can broadcast messages to multiple families to convey school information (Fruchter, Galleta, & White, 1992).

Daily Family Phone Messages

Teresa Jo Clemens-Bower (1997), a teacher at **Errol Hassell Elementary School** in Aloha, OR, records a one-minute voice mail message to inform family members about what is happening in her class each day. At the end of the recorded message, family members and students calling in have the option of leaving messages. “*Over the past seven years,*” she says, “*parents have heard trumpet performances of Three Blind Mice, responded to request for toilet paper rolls, left many messages of thanks and praise, and have always appreciated feeling connected in a non-threatening way. Most importantly, children who used to report they did nothing at school now know that parents now have a way to really hear what has been going on. This back-up system has increased the amount that children share with parents and has families feeling like our school is doing great things for children!*” (personal communication, August 12, 2002).

Homework hotlines where students and parents can access homework assignments on a daily basis have also become increasingly popular. The **New York City United Federation of Teachers** maintains **Dial-A-Teacher**, a homework helping service for parents and students, 12 hours weekly in eight different languages. (See **Strategy 5: Supporting family involvement on the homefront**). Some schools offer regular “parent call-in” times for parents to discuss their questions or concerns with teachers or administrators (Moles, 1996).

The **Pioneer Central School District** in Yorkshire, NY, uses a **ParentCONNECT** system maintained by the school district to communicate with parents. Logging into the site, parents may access information about their children including: attendance records, discipline incidents, and health and immunization records. In addition, parents of students attending Pioneer Middle School and Pioneer High School have access to information pertaining to homework assignments, report card grades, and current grade point averages. ParentCONNECT users may also subscribe to automated e-mail notification of attendance reports, discipline incidents, failing grades, or missing assignments.

Local cable channels and radio stations can also be effective communication vehicles for school-family information. For non-English speaking parents, school events may be publicized on radio stations/programs that broadcast in their language (Rockwell, Andrew, & Hawley, 1996).

Making sure that school-home communication is conveyed in multiple ways and does not assume that all families have access to technology will help all families in the school community stay informed.

Processes for resolving family concerns

Each school needs to have a clear process for resolving family concerns. “Although conflict in schools is inevitable, effective school leaders minimize, manage, and eliminate misunderstandings” by addressing concerns in a responsive manner (Strickland & Chan, 2001, p.81). A parental complaint form may be used to document the individual making the complaint, the nature of the complaint, and the follow-up actions taken by the school to address the concern. An electronic version may be posted on the school’s web page.

For disagreements arising from special education issues, “the best, fastest, and least costly way to solve a conflict is through informal problem solving” (Smith, 2001). Family members and educators “should keep in mind that the student’s interest is the main objective, and, regardless of the outcome, school personnel and parents will still have to work together” (Smith, 2001).

Family Support Teams

Peck Elementary School, a high poverty school in Houston, TX, has created a Family Support Team to assist teachers and families when they have problems related to children’s learning or behavior. The team communicates to the family what the school is doing to address the problem and works to involve the support of the family at home. This promotes consistency between what is happening at home and at school. The team also helps to “identify and resolve” home situations that may be affecting children’s success at school. The team, which meets weekly, includes the project manager, school principal, Title I coordinator, and school nurse, according to Tameka Qualls, project manager.

(Council for Chief State School Officers and The Charles A. Dana Center, 2002;
personal communication December 5, 2002)

If family members and educators are unable to resolve the conflict, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides for mediation, “a voluntary and confidential process that brings conflicting parties together” to resolve their differences and avoid due process through the assistance of a trained mediator (Smith, 2001). “Conflicts that arise out of misunderstandings or lack of shared information can be resolved through mediators helping parents, educators, and service providers to communicate directly with one another” (Engiles, Fromme, LeResche, & Moses, 1999). When working with culturally diverse families, it is important that mediators be skilled in “diversity, cultural competence, flexibility, and the design of processes that are culturally relevant and appropriate to all participants” and to put into practice “collaborative dispute resolution strategies that respect diverse methods of handling conflicts” (Engiles, Fromme, LeResche, & Moses, 1999).

Following parent-teacher disagreements, it is important to be ready to “mend fences” (Smith & Smith, 2003). “There may be times when you disagree with families or they disagree with you. Remember that it is in everyone’s interest to understand and accept these differences and not let them interfere with the ongoing collaborative relationship.”

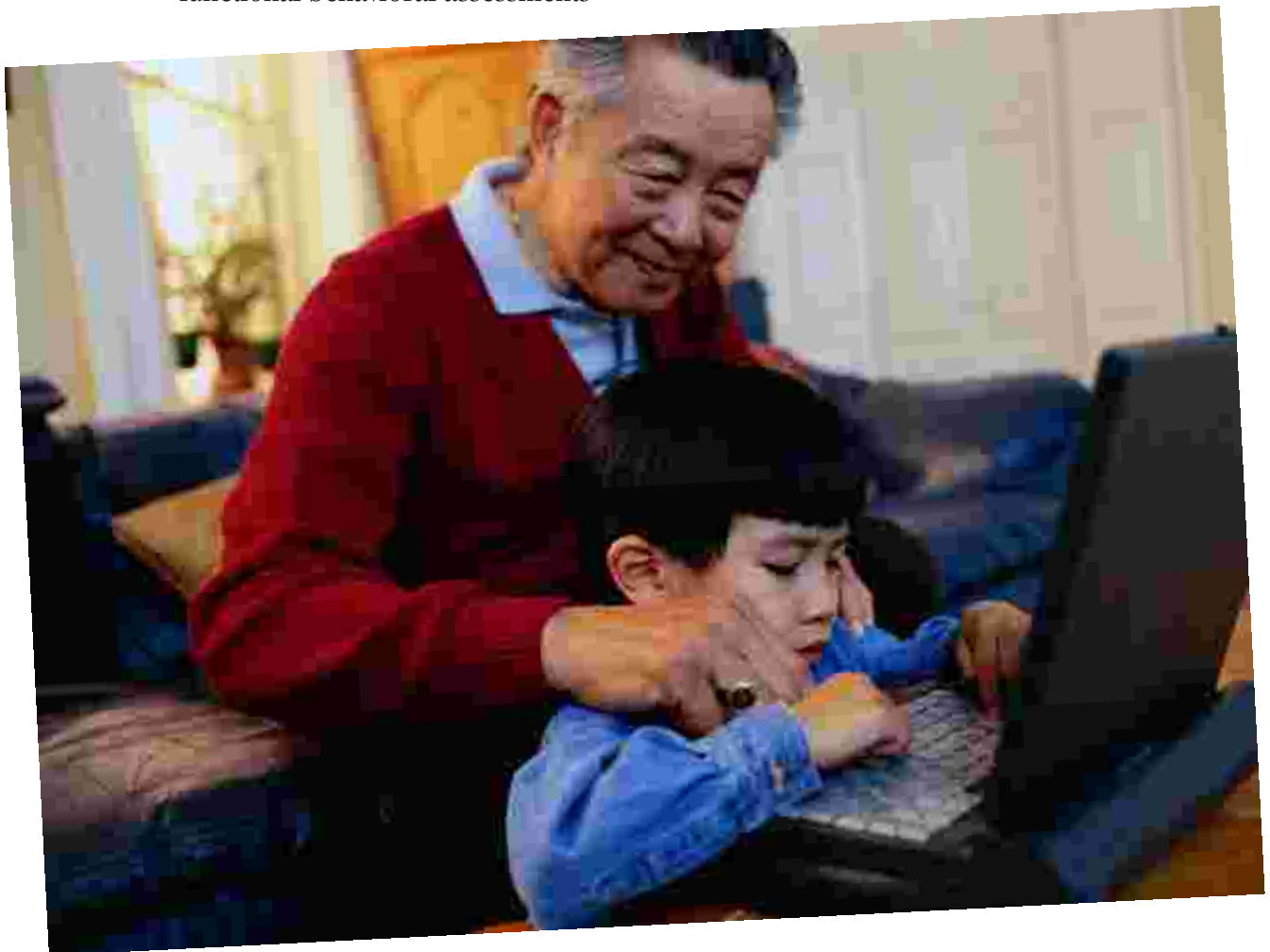
Guidelines for Written School-family Communication

- Include non-custodial fathers and mothers in all correspondence, including divorced parents as well as parents whose children are in foster care.
- Include parents whose children are placed out of district in all communication.
- Use current terminology that is respectful of families who have children with disabilities.
- Make sure written communication is easily understood, jargon free, and available in the native language of all families represented in the school, and that it recognizes that family members other than parents may be raising children (“Dear Parent or Caregiver”).
- For families with emerging literacy levels, record communications on cassette tapes and make these available through the family center lending library. (See ***Strategy 2: Building a Support Infrastructure*** p. 36.) (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Critical Issue, 1996).

Strategy 5: Supporting family involvement on the homefront

Action Steps:

- Begin early in children's education to involve families in meaningful ways.
- Educate parents to use effective, age-appropriate strategies to encourage learning at home
- Assign homework projects that involve family interaction
- Provide information/resource support for parents helping their children with homework assignments
- Actively involve parents in educational activities such as action research projects and functional behavioral assessments



Going On To College Program

Families play a key role in supporting their children's education in Going On To COLLEGE (G.O.T. COLLEGE) developed by Families In Schools (FIS), a nonprofit organization in Los Angeles, CA, dedicated to strengthening parent engagement to improve student outcomes. The program is based on the success of the Mother/Daughter College Preparation Program, which sought to increase academic achievement by forming mother-daughter partnerships that encouraged 5th and 6th grade students and their parents to plan early for a college. Beginning with the 2002-2003 school year, the program became co-ed, including both boys and girls and their parents. The program includes field trips (university visits, conferences, action planning for college, etc.), student meetings that focus on college/career awareness and academic/life skills, and parent meetings that focus on topics such as college awareness and preparation, home support, and family relationships.

Participants in the program are chosen through school staff recommendations, an application process, and an interview. The program focuses on fifth grade and middle school students and their parents who must meet these criteria: 1) the student would be the first member of his/her family to become a college graduate; 2) the student has the potential and ability to succeed in college; 3) both parent and student commit to actively participate in the program.

Families In Schools developed the training materials and provide training to school and district staff. FIS staff also meet with the teacher mentors on a regular basis to provide coaching and assistance with program implementation. Teachers receive a stipend funded by schools and districts. The local district office also covers transportation for field trips. District leaders and university partners provide personnel and other resources to support the program.

During the 2002-2003 school year the program served 818 students and parents in 18 Los Angeles area schools. Evaluation of the program indicates benefits for participants as well as schools. Participating students and parents increase their knowledge of college and college requirements and their communication about academics. Students demonstrate more motivation to succeed academically. The program also benefits other family members as they learn more about college planning. The program benefits participating schools *“by increasing staff understanding of the importance of early college awareness in elementary and middle school and the value of working with families”* (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2002, p. 163).

According to Ruth Yoon, FIS Executive Director, *“the G.O.T. COLLEGE Program fills a great need — preparing students and families to set a goal for college at an early age.”* A former parent participant commented, *“Before joining this program, I never thought that my daughter could go to college. Now, I know that she can and will.”*

Weekend Study Buddies

Elementary classrooms often include learning centers that encourage self-directed student learning. A special education teacher in **Gwinnett County Public Schools** in Duluth, GA, took this concept and designed the “Weekend Study Buddy” as a portable learning center for her students with mild disabilities ages 5-9 (Stephens & Jairrels, 2003). Using cloth (more durable than paper) or paper (more cost effective and simpler to make than cloth) bags, Harristina Stephens created individualized learning centers that her students could take home on weekends.

Materials included in a Study Buddy can be individualized according to a student’s Individualized Education Program (Addition Facts Study Buddy, Reading Comprehension Study Buddy, etc.) and may include books, flash cards, number lines, photos, magnetic letters, and other manipulatives that students can use while working independently or with a parent. Ms Stephens also sent home written reports about her students’ classroom performance in each Weekend Study Buddy. She discovered after several weeks of use that the portable learning centers increased parent involvement and improved students’ reading and writing skills.

Stephens, who now serves as a learning disabilities teacher at Hull Middle School, said of the value of utilizing Weekend Study Buddies: *“As an educator, it is important that I find ways to help my students become successful learners. The Weekend Study Buddy helps me accomplish that through identifying where students are weak and parent involvement. When parents are involved, students become life long learners.”* A parent who participated in the study buddies project commented: *“When my child started with the study buddy, she was not motivated, but when we sat down together and completed the skills her attitude changed. She became excited about learning and her grades reflected it.”*

Programs that involve family members in the education of their children such as the Going on to College program and Weekend Study Buddies recognize the important connection between “what is taught (at school) and what is encouraged, practiced, discussed and celebrated at home” (Epstein, 2001, p. 510). Families can effectively help by supporting, encouraging, and motivating their children, monitoring their work, celebrating their progress, and engaging in interactions that will help children complete homework and do well in school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Epstein, 2001).

Age-appropriate family involvement

The type of family involvement that is most beneficial in the home environment changes as children grow and mature. Helping children with homework is most appropriate at the elementary school level when families understand homework concepts and use developmentally appropriate practices when helping their children (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000; Balli, 1998). To support students doing well academically during middle and high school, parents should not interfere with self-study, but reinforce autonomy so that their children develop time-management and study skills that will enable them to become autonomous, lifelong learners (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000). Families can also support children as they grow older by helping them develop positive attitudes and values, discussing school-related issues at home, helping children to plan their educational and transition programs, maintaining high expectations for their children, and reinforcing their children’s feelings of personal competence by expressing confidence in their ability to succeed (Hoover-Dempsey, Battaito, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001; Marchant, Sharon, & Rothlisberg, 2001; Sui-Chi & Willms, 1996; Patrikako, 1997). Some students will benefit significantly from opportunities to partially or fully participate in home activities (cooking,

shopping, laundry, menu planning, etc.). Increasing experience and responsibility in these areas can significantly contribute to their potential for a successful transition into community living.

Promising practices that encourage and support family involvement in the home environment include communication to family members about student learning, programs that involve families in homework activities, homework helping services, literacy programs, action research projects, and functional behavioral assessments.

Guidance on student learning

Most parents want to help their children learn, but some may be unsure about what assistance is most helpful or appropriate. Working together, schools can help families develop a home environment that supports children's learning by providing written materials, workshops, web sites, home visits, etc., that offer guidance in the following ways:

- Informing family members about curricular goals and assessments for students in each subject at each grade level with suggested ways to complement the curriculum in the home environment.
- Informing family members of homework expectations and policies, including information about how to best assist children with homework assignments.
- Providing opportunities for parents to learn about differences in how children learn (learning styles, multiple intelligences, etc.) and prepare for school (studying, motivation, test preparation, etc.).
- Involving family members in setting goals for students, making course selections, determining Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, and planning for transition to postsecondary education, careers, and the workplace.
- Providing opportunities for family members to learn about different types and levels of involvement and how they can effectively support the education of their children.
- Demonstrating to family members ways to reinforce behaviors at home that enhance learning, such as time management, organizational skills, planning, and limited television viewing and computer use. Encouraging family members to model good reading habits, participate in informal educational activities in the home and community, and promote lifelong learning.
(Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000)

Learning Families

A learning family recognizes that parents are not only teachers but also learners. They can learn from their children, and adults and children can learn at the same time. These learning experiences can be either structured or more casual experiences. Louv (2002) describes these basic characteristics of a learning family:

- Any family can be a learning family.
- Learning families build a basic foundation for learning in the home and in their interactions with children.
- Parents view themselves “as their children’s learning partners, not their programmers.”
- “A learning family seizes the moment” to learn new things together.
- Anyone in the family can be an expert.
- “A learning family uses the whole community as a classroom and laboratory.”
- A learning family uses travel to learn.
- A learning family has fun while learning.

Involving families in homework activities

One of the most successful programs in the country for involving families in homework activities is the Teachers Involving Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) elementary and middle grade program which features an interactive homework process to involve families in math, science, and language arts activities with their children. The program's two primary goals are:

- to encourage students to complete their homework well and to improve attitudes, behaviors, and achievements; and
- to create good information and interactions at home between students and their families about schoolwork (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997).

All TIPS homework assignments incorporate student-family interaction. Evaluations of the program, which have been consistently positive, indicate that a "large number of parents, previously not involved with their children's homework, were actively involved in TIPS; teachers were reporting much higher rates of return for TIPS homework than for regular homework; and the TIPS program itself helped teachers communicate with parents" (Whitaker & Fiore, 2001, p. 188).

The following features make the TIPS program unique:

- The program helps all families become involved, not just those who have knowledge in subject areas.
- The program makes homework the student's responsibility and does not require parents to "teach" subjects or skills.
- The program requires students to share their work, ideas, and progress with their families.
- The program includes a home-to-school communication feature that allows families to comment or request information from teachers. (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2000)

The TIPS program can be introduced to parents through letters home, newsletters, or meetings. Classroom or grade-level meetings can be used to show parents examples of TIPS activities and how parents can be involved in them. Students also need an orientation to the program, emphasizing the family involvement component of each assignment.

Homework helping services

The United Federation of Teachers in New York City offers a Dial-A-Teacher homework helping service that provides parents and students free help via telephone when they need assistance doing daily homework assignments in all subject areas. A staff of 45 teachers responds to more than 2,000 calls weekly; approximately 10% of these requests for assistance come from parents. The program is available 12 hours a week on Monday-Thursday afternoons and evenings and offers help in eight different languages (United Federation of Teachers, 2002). Many teachers now post homework assignments on Internet web sites where parents with computers can access helpful information (Imelli & Purvis, 2000). Homework hotlines that include recorded messages of the day's homework assignments are also helpful to both parents and students.

Action research projects

Action research projects bring together teachers and families in new roles and responsibilities that "ultimately strengthen parents' involvement in their child's education" (Kay & Fitzgerald, 1997, p. 8). Parents' involvement in action research has much in common with the involvement of parents in the special education process:

Special educators have been trend-setters in parent involvement, using the individualized education program (IEP) to tap into parents' knowledge about their children. Parent-teacher action research takes the next step — inviting parents to join teachers in a systematic exploration of a puzzling issue. When they work together as equals, parents and teachers have more opportunities to express their respect for one another's wisdom, learn more about the other's perspective, and often become allies in making improvements in the school. (Kay & Fitzgerald, 1997, p. 8)

Action research projects usually involve parents participating as partners with teachers in research on their own children (Kay & Fitzgerald, 1997), although the projects may also entail research on broader educational issues in the school.

The action research process entails several steps:

1. Choosing a research question(s)
2. Collecting data
3. Reflecting
4. Analyzing data
5. Drawing conclusions
6. Brainstorming ideas
7. Developing a plan of action (Kay & Fitzgerald, 1997)

In action research projects focusing on an individual child, parents and teachers set mutual goals and carry out action plans that provide for consistency between home and school. The observations and reflections that are afforded by these projects “yield new knowledge about the child that helps both teachers and parents improve their practices” (*Achieving*, 2002). This process requires “a great deal of commitment from everyone on the team: parents, teachers, and student” (Ryan, Kay, Fitzgerald, Paquette, & Smith, 2001).

Functional behavioral assessments

Family members can be involved in various kinds of assessments of their children's learning. For children with behavioral disorders, families are active participants in the assessment process and implementation of interventions to address problem behaviors. The 1997 amendment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that a functional behavioral assessment be conducted “when a child exhibits significant behavioral difficulties,” in order to “identify why the behavior occurs within a specific context . . . [and] to develop appropriate interventions” (Asmus, Vollmer, & Borrero, 2002). Once the appropriate intervention components are identified, parents, teachers, and other care providers are offered training and coaching so that the intervention can be carried out consistently at home and school. When a comprehensive approach involving parents, teachers, and care providers is used, “there is an increased likelihood for long-term success” (Asmus, Vollmer, & Borrero, 2002).

Parents have valuable insights into their children's behavior — the possible triggers, underlying messages, and desired effects. Too often, their only opportunities to share those insights occur in the wake of serious behavioral incidents, when they are perceived as making excuses or minimizing the behavior at issue. Parent involvement in the FBA process is crucial because it represents an opportunity to use parent's knowledge proactively rather than defensively.

Donald A. Lash, Metropolitan Parent Center and Long Island

Strategy 6: Supporting educational opportunities for families

Action Steps:

- Conduct assessments of families' educational needs to determine the content and form of delivery
- Involve a diverse group of parents and community members when planning parent education programs
- Provide opportunities for parents and children to learn together
- Provide opportunities for parents to share challenges and offer emotional support to one another
- Reach out with educational opportunities to families who rarely attend school activities



Fifth Grade Transition

For the past several years the Fifth Grade Transition Program at **Monica Leary Elementary School** in Rush, NY, has provided information and eased the anxiety of both parents and students who are facing the significant transition from elementary to middle school (Salinas, Jansom, & Nolan, 2000). During the spring of each year, sixth grade students who have graduated from Monica Leary return to the elementary school to discuss the culture of middle school (backpacks, lockers, lunch choices, homework assignments, etc.) and share their experiences with fifth graders and their parents.

Following the student-parent activity, graduating fifth grade students meet with the middle school students in a “*kid-to-kid*” session while parents of the fifth and sixth grade students meet separately to discuss mutual topics of interest such as schedules and supplies. “*Talking to other parents and students who have just been through the anxious transition you are facing can be reassuring,*” said parent Patricia St. Clair (personal communication, January 28, 2003). “*Parents and students alike realize the value of sharing the practical, day-to-day experiences of someone who’s ‘been there.’*”

“*Parents are reassuring to one another,*” says Sue Mills, elementary school principal (personal communication, August 21, 2002). Each year attendance increases, attracting 20-30 parents and their fifth grade students.

The **Monica Leary Elementary School** transition to middle school program exemplifies a practice that includes both parents and children in teaching and learning roles while giving and receiving support as they face an important milestone in their school careers.

Parent education is considered an “essential component” of parent involvement programs (Freedman & Montgomery, 1994; DiCamillo, 2001). However, “Parent education is not a single concept that comes in one easy-to-identify package. Rather, it is a group of strategies that can assume a number of directions and formats” (Rockwell, Andrew, & Hawley, 1996, p. 151).

High quality parent education programs lead to increased parent volunteerism, better teacher-parent communication, and improved child behavior and attendance (Covarrubia, 2000). The benefits of parent education programs “can increase many-fold when different organizations work together and provide their expertise in putting together quality parent education programs” (DiCamillo, 2001, p. 177). Meeting the complex needs of families for social, emotional, and educational support requires a community effort.

Characteristics of effective parent education programs include:

1. Assessments to determine parent and student needs (Conner, 2000; Freedman & Montgomery, 1994)
2. Involvement of parents, teachers, and community members in planning the programs (Conner, 2000)
3. Consistent outreach that attracts and retains parents and involves fathers in an active role (Beale, 1999; France & Hager, 1993; Freedman & Montgomery, 1994)
4. Demonstration of “sensitivity, respect, and affirmation of diversity” (Hurd, Lerner, & Barton, 1999; National PTA, *Building successful partnerships*, 2000; Freedman & Montgomery, 1994)
5. Development of “ongoing training programs in which parents, administrators, and staff participate as teachers and learners” (Freedman & Montgomery, 1994)

Schools can select from an array of strategies for delivering parent education so that programs meet the needs of their families. These include home visits by parent educators, parent workshops, programs that support parents’ own educational needs, programs that develop parent leadership, parent/child education opportunities, support groups, and teen parenting programs.

Home visits by parent educators

Home visits are an effective strategy to reach parents who may not feel comfortable coming to school. They allow educators to individualize teaching and modeling according to each family’s needs. Additionally, home visits allow children to observe teachers and parents sharing the educational role. (See ***Strategy 4: Developing family-friendly communication***).

Parent workshops

Workshops can help family members develop skills to help them with parenting. Care must be taken, however, to build on parents’ strengths and to respect cultural differences in parenting approaches, such as individualistic versus collectivistic orientations (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2001). Schools that attempt to educate parents by “telling them what they must do” may cause resentment toward the school and the negative perception that the school is “demanding” and not “family-friendly” (Onikama, Hammond, & Koki, 1998, p. 12).

Successful workshops require careful planning and implementation, including the following steps:

- Assess family needs through surveys, home visits, or other informal methods
- Identify resources needed to conduct workshops, including specialists, skilled parents, practitioners, and educators
- Recruit participants through a variety of means — written materials, home visits, telephone networking, and meeting announcements
- Provide support services to make it easier for parents to attend, such as child care and transportation
- Evaluate the success of the program through surveys and/or group discussions to determine how the program might be improved and what activities need to be added (Moles, 1996)

A sampling of possible workshop topics includes:

- Anger management
- Transitions between schools and from school to the community
- Advocating for your child with disabilities
- Monitoring television watching
- Helping children develop positive self-esteem
- Creating summer learning opportunities
- Prevention of child abuse
- Positive parenting strategies
- Single parenting
- Father involvement
- Step parenting
- Managing multiple family responsibilities
- Accessing community resources
- Parenting grandchildren

Programs that support parents' own educational needs

Schools can encourage greater family involvement by offering family members opportunities for their own education and enrichment. Many family centers offer a variety of educational opportunities, ranging from aerobics to advanced computer classes for college credit.

Parent University. The ***Rochester City School District*** in Rochester, NY, provides education and training for parents through its Parent University. Parent involvement/empowerment classes are offered at three different levels — beginning to advanced — according to parent liaison Cynthia Minz (personal communication, August 26, 2002).

Collaborative Parent Training Classes. ***Stillwater Area Schools*** provides parent training classes for Stillwater, MN, area parents of students who have or are at risk for behavior disorders. The content of the weekly, two-hour classes was developed by a school psychologist who co-facilitated the six sessions with community mental health professionals. Participants were offered dinner and reimbursement for transportation and child care costs. Program content included: teaching social and problem-solving skills, preventing placement in more restrictive settings, reducing specific behavioral problems, teaching conflict resolution skills, preventing increase of mild problems, crisis intervention, violence prevention, parent involvement, generalization of program effects, and individualized goals (National Association of School Psychologists, 2002).

Programs that develop parent leadership

Many schools now offer opportunities for parents to learn effective leadership skills. As an outgrowth of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) passed in 1990, the Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership was launched in 1997 by the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence to build leadership capacity in parents (Henderson & Raimondo, 2001). Many schools in the state realize they cannot institute major reforms without the assistance of parents, so they now have a “powerful incentive to engage families in improving student achievement” (Henderson & Raimondo, 2001, p. 28). Two hundred participants each year attend three, intensive two-day sessions that are held around the state. Each parent graduate agrees to design and complete a project aimed at improving student achievement, increasing parent involvement, and having a lasting impact. Many graduates of the Institute have become officers in parent-teacher organizations and run for school board positions. Steve St. Clair, Principal of Conway Middle Schools, says the Institute “unlocks the potential in a parent leader.” For principals, he says, “it is much easier to communicate the school’s needs and goals with parents who have had this kind of training. Parent leaders can communicate a vision with other parents, often in a way that staff members cannot” (Henderson & Raimondo, 2001, p. 32). Many Parent Training and Information Centers and Developmental Disabilities Planning Councils also offer parent and consumer leadership development opportunities.

Parent/child education opportunities

Many schools offer opportunities for children and parents to learn together. Intergenerational literacy programs have grown nationwide during recent years in order to promote parent and child literacy development and to break the cycle of poverty in urban areas (DiCamillo, 2001).

Parent-child computer education: The Howard Lewis Parent Center in Buffalo, NY, offers parent-child computer classes for students in grades 6 through 12. Parents and children learn skills in desktop publishing and computer programming together. The center also allows parents to take home computers to learn with their children (U.S. Department of Education, *Family Involvement*, 1997).

Community School District 10, the largest urban school district in New York City, is working to bridge the digital divide with a cost-sharing wireless laptop leasing program for middle school students and parents (Zardoya, 2001). The program will be in its third year with the 2002-2003 school year. Under the lease contract agreement, 36 monthly payments are shared by the school district and families, and parents are given the option to purchase the computers at the end of the lease period for \$1. A supporting professional development program includes a “three-pronged process for teachers, parents and students.” Parents must participate in a 12-hour training program, conducted in English and Spanish, before the laptops are taken home by students (Director of Information Technology Mario Fico, personal communication, September 6, 2002). Among the positive impacts of the program, which will grow to more than 300 computers being leased in the district during the 2002-2003 school year, is an increase in student attendance and parent involvement.

The Hungerford Mosaic Project

At the **PS 721 Richard H. Hungerford School** in Staten Island, NY, parents became “*arts partners*” with their children to create the Hungerford Mosaic. The one-year Parents as Arts Partners program was funded by the New York City-based Center for Arts Education (www.cae.nyc.org).

Teaching artist Kristi Pfister hosted a tour of the Staten Island Zoo for 47 family members and students who participated in the project. Ms. Pfister showed how zoo animals are translated into ceramic mosaic imagery. She then hosted a series of four, two-hour family workshops at the school for families and children to learn how to create a ceramic mosaic. A total of 70 family members and their children attended these Friday-night workshops, according to arts coordinator and teacher Linsey Miller. The result was the creation of a 2x4-foot ceramic mosaic that is now displayed in the school’s lobby. Hungerford School is a District 75 school serving 235 K-12 students with disabilities.

“This collaboration has enabled our students, siblings, parents and teachers to experience the deep satisfaction of creating artwork and giving to the community,” says Principal Dr. Mary McInerney. *“Families have learned new ways to use the arts to help improve their child’s perceptual, motor and problem-solving skills”* (personal communication, September 30, 2002). Parent Liz Devoti said the project *“bonded family members as a unique community.”* It also *“inspired us to see our abilities and strengths, and to recognize that the disabled member of our family has many hidden talents”* (personal communication, January 20, 2003).

Support groups

When families meet in support groups they discover they are dealing with common issues and life circumstances and are not alone. During group sessions, a facilitator can help parents “to support each other while they work to help themselves” (Lueder, 1998, p. 176). Support groups can be organized around a single issue or be open-ended, depending upon the concerns of the participating parents. Groups may also be formed to appeal to family members with similar concerns (grandparents raising grandchildren, single parents, families with children with disabilities, etc.). Guidance counselors and school psychologists can take an active part in support group sessions.

Kinship Care Support Group

Many children are now being raised by adults other than their natural parents. In order to meet the needs of these caregivers, the Grove Park Elementary School #224 in the **Baltimore, MD, School District** began a Kinship Care Support Group (National Network of Partnership Schools, 2002). With a grant from the local Department of Social Services, the school’s Action Team began one-hour, biweekly support group sessions, available during both mornings and afternoons, to provide outreach and support to caregivers. Community members provided referrals to resources, counseling, and agencies to participants. Caregivers who attended sessions became more involved in school-related activities and benefited from their interactions with other care providers.

Teen parenting programs

“Schools are the social institution with the greatest opportunity and capacity to educate and intervene in the lives of school-age parents” (Lindsay & Enright, 1997, p. 22). These young parents need “special attention, skillful direction, and sensitive support” (Berger, 1995, p. 286). The Rochester City School District in Rochester, NY, has operated a Young Mothers Program since 1969. The program, housed at the Family Learning Center, offers education and comprehensive support services for teen mothers. Prenatal and postnatal care courses, career development classes, job training, and independent living skills classes are offered to up to 200 teen mothers a year. The services of a public health nurse, guidance counselor, and social worker are also provided as a part of the program. Additionally, the program houses an infant day care center and a baby boutique where students may purchase clothes, toys, and furniture with credits earned in the program, according to Program Administrator Audrey Cummings (personal communication, September 4, 2002).

In New York City, the Living for the Young Family through Education (LYFE) program operates in 41 centers, some self-contained and some operating inside traditional schools (Lee, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, *Compendium*, 1999). These combination schools/day care centers serve 600 infants and young children, ranging in age from two months to 33 months, and 700-1,000 young mothers and 50 young fathers annually. The LYFE program provides comprehensive education and social services to meet the needs of adolescent parents and help them transition with the support of community services. The program is primarily funded by the New York City Board of Education and Administration for Children’s Services-Child Care.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Project

Ensley Elementary School in Pensacola, FL, winner of the 2003 National PTA Phoebe Apperson Hearst Excellence in Education Partnership Award, collaborated with a local child advocacy group to meet the needs of more than 75 grandparents raising grandchildren in its school community (National PTA, *Phoebe*, 2003). The *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Project* seeks to strengthen the child-caregiver bond in order to empower these families and reduce risk of school failure. The program provides a weekly support group for families, including a dinner, tutoring and other activities for children, and information for grandparents on services to help them raise their grandchildren. Monthly family outings, quarterly respite care for grandparents, and weekly case management are also provided.

Strategy 7: Creating family-school-community partnerships

Action Steps:

- Bring together families, schools, and community organizations in a collaborative effort to meet the comprehensive needs of children, families, and the community
- Open schools beyond traditional school hours and mission to become community learning centers for everyone in the neighborhood
- Cultivate school-business relationships that will benefit both school and business partners and sustain family-involvement programs



Community Schools in New York City

The **Children's Aid Society** (CAS) in New York City has expanded partnering efforts over the last ten years to develop community schools: from an initial site in 1992 to eight additional sites in three neighborhoods serving 10,000 children and their families. Beginning with the 2002-2003 school year, the CAS is adding two additional school sites in South Bronx including a full-service neighborhood center (Richard Negron, personal communication, August 20, 2002).

A combination of federal, state, and private funding supports these schools, which while differing structurally and programmatically have created a sense of renewed hope in their communities (Children's Aid Society, 2001, p. 9). One of the newer CAS community schools, an elementary school located in East Harlem, features a unique partnership involving the New York City Board of Education, Children's Aid Society, and Mount Sinai Hospital. The school focuses on comprehensive health prevention and promotion, with particular emphasis on the prevention and treatment of asthma, which affects a "sizable percentage" of the students who attend the school (Children's Aid Society, 2001, p. 38).

Parents were involved in the initial needs assessment process conducted at each CAS community school and are presented on the School Leadership Team, which meets monthly for planning and decision making. In these schools *"parents are treated as partners rather than service recipients"* (Children's Aid Society, 2001, p. 48).

The family resource centers in each school are considered parents' *"first point of access"* to the school, where they are welcome to wait for their children, talk with a teacher, look into adult education opportunities, sign up to volunteer, or use a computer to access their child's homework assignment for the day (Children's Aid Society, 2001, p. 40). *"For many parents, these centers are 'an arena of comfort' in neighborhoods where there is much stress and hardship"* (Agosto, 1999).

External evaluations of these programs have indicated *"a number of tangible accomplishments,"* including improved academic performance; higher attendance rates; the development of positive, safe learning environments; increased parent involvement in *"many ways throughout the school"* (including a *"significant and notable presence"* of parents noted in the schools and teachers rating parent involvement as an asset); and improved student-teacher relationships (Children's Aid Society, 2001, p. 56).

"The sweeping changes that have occurred in families, schools, and communities require educators to collaborate with families and communities if they are to be successful in their primary mission of educating children" (Decker, 2001, p. 45). The Community Schools initiative that has proven successful in some of the most challenging neighborhoods in New York City is one of many partnerships involving schools, families, and community agencies and organizations that are multiplying across the country.

Another successful initiative in New York City is the Beacon School-Based Community Centers program operating in 81 schools, the majority of which are open seven days a week (New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, 2002). These school/community centers offer children, youth, and adults a blend of social services,

recreation, educational and vocational activities, health education, medical referrals, social activities, and community meeting places in a safe environment. In their 1998 survey, Melaville and Blank discovered that school-community initiatives across the country were “skyrocketing” and noted that these collaborations illustrate a “strong sense of direction and shared purpose” among participating schools and agencies, although they are very diverse in terms of design, management, and funding (Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, *Addressing Barriers*, 1999, p. 6-7).

Benefits of school-family-community collaborations

One of the six **National PTA** standards (*Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000) summarizes the benefits of school-family-community collaborations: “*When schools and communities work together, both are strengthened in synergistic ways and make gains that outpace what either entity could accomplish on its own.*”

- *Families access community resources more easily;*
- *Businesses connect education programs with the realities of the workplace;*
- *Seniors contribute wisdom and gain a greater sense of purpose; and ultimately,*
- *Students serve and learn beyond their school involvement.”*

Studies over the past two decades document that community organizing has contributed to the following changes in schools:

- Upgraded facilities;
- Improved school leadership and staffing;
- Higher quality learning programs;
- New resources and programs; and
- New funding for after-school programs and family supports (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 8)

School-community partnerships have the ability to “weave together a critical mass of resources and strategies to enhance caring communities that support all youth and their families and enable success at school and beyond” (Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, *School-community Partnerships* 1999, p. 2).

The Community School Assessment Checklist can be used by school and community partners to assess supports that are currently available in the school and community as an initial step in planning integrated services (Blank & Langford, 2001). Other useful tools include the Community School Program and Service Checklist and the Community School Funding Source Assessment (Blank & Langford, 2000).

The Syracuse City School District Partnership Policy (excerpt)

The Board of Education of the Syracuse City School District believes that education is the shared responsibility of the students, parents, family, school, and community. Further, the Board recognizes that the academic achievement and success of our students depend on the strength of the partnerships developed among students, parents, families, schools, and the community, from preschool through graduation and beyond.

The Board of Education believes that strong partnerships can be developed through nurturing respect, sharing knowledge, supporting each partner's role, collaborating on matters of importance, and appreciating the contributions each partner makes to student achievement. Parents and families provide their children with values, supervision and assistance in goal setting. They offer knowledge of their children's unique histories, traditions, experiences, resources, and challenges. Educators contribute professional dedication, caring, and expertise. The community provides cultural and financial resources, support services, collaboration, and monitoring. Students, who are at the center of these partnerships, bring unique skills, talents, and learning styles, and ultimately are responsible for their own academic achievement.

(Epstein, 2001, p. 332)

Barriers to school-family-community collaborations

Although school-family-community collaborations are proliferating, many school and community programs and services continue to function “in relative isolation from each other,” and conflicts often arise over turf, use of space, confidentiality, and liability when school and community professionals try to collaborate (Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, *School-community*, 1999, p. 7). Despite its “promising direction” for strengthening families and neighborhoods, partnership building “requires an enlightened vision, creative leadership, and new and multifaceted roles for professionals who work in schools and communities, as well as for all who are willing to assume leadership” (Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, *School-Community*, 1999, p. ii). School-community partnership development also takes time; partnerships are built “one relationship at a time” and need continual nurturing (Decker, 2001, p. 46). Collaboration also often requires changes in traditional roles, responsibilities, expectations, and schedules, which can prove difficult for partners (U.S. Department of Education, *Keeping*, 1997).

Key Dimensions of School-Community Collaborations:

- 1. Initiation*
- 2. Nature of collaboration*
- 3. Focus*
- 4. Scope of collaboration*
- 5. Scope of potential impact*
- 6. Ownership and governance of programs and services*
- 7. Location of programs and services*
- 8. Degree of cohesiveness among multiple interventions*

(Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, *School-community partnerships* 1999, p. 2)

Strategies included in this section, which have proven effective in building school-family-community partnerships, are community learning centers, full service/community schools, wraparound services for students who have or are at risk for developing emotional and/or behavioral disabilities, parent training and information centers, and school-business partnerships.

Community learning centers

Community learning centers “extend the concept of public education beyond the traditional K-12 program and are not limited by traditional school schedules and roles. Community schools are open schools, available for use before and after school for academic, co-curricular, recreational, health, social service, and workforce-preparation programs for all ages” (Decker, 2001, p. 45). “Keeping school doors open during nontraditional school hours provides students, parents, and the community with access to valuable educational resources” (U.S. Department of Education, *Keeping*, 1997). Schools may be used during these nonschool hours to serve families in a variety of ways: for community meetings, adult education, local theatrical productions, candidate forums, health screenings, and physical fitness classes, for instance (U.S. Department of Education, *Keeping*, 1997).

A community learning center can also serve as an after-school and summer learning environment for children where they are safe and supervised. Programs offered in these centers include tutoring and mentoring; drug and violence prevention; youth-focused activities (Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.); computer instruction; language instruction; employment preparation or training; and supervised recreation and athletic programs (U.S. Department of Education, *Keeping*, 1997).

A successful public-private partnership in New York City has created a comprehensive after-school program at Washington Irving High School that has given students “enhanced opportunities to explore their interests, connect with the community, and form positive relationships with adults (Durkin & Jarney, 2001, p. 50). In 1994, the 14th Street-Union Square Local Development Corporation formed a partnership with the school that has resulted in a “culture of raised expectations, improved self-esteem and increased academic achievement” at the school. In 2000, aided by a grant from The After School Corporation, the partnership created a diverse after-school program for educational enrichment that includes a range of corporate and not-for-profit support from the surrounding neighborhood. For example, Con Edison, a local utility company, sponsors an after-school robotics team where students work with professional engineers. Similarly, the after-school drama team works closely with the nearby Vineyard Theater, giving students experience working with professional playwrights, producers, and directors. Program Director Jenny Bailey indicated that 450 students (about 20% of the student population) participate in the after-school clubs, which are an extension of the school’s curriculum and give students an opportunity to work in smaller groups and benefit from more individualized attention (personal communication, August 21, 2002). An “After-School Showcase” is held periodically, giving students an opportunity to demonstrate to their families what they are learning.

Full-service/community schools

Full-service schools, also referred to as community schools, act as “one-stop centers where the educational, physical, psychological, and social” needs of families are met in a holistic approach (Dryfoos, 1996). These schools “combine the best quality educational practices with a wide range of vital in-house health and social services to ensure that children are physically, emotionally, and socially prepared to learn” (Samberg & Sheeran, 2000, p. 30). For children, teachers, and parents alike, this approach ensures that “help is often just a step away” (Children’s Aid Society, 2001).

A community school is “both a set of partnerships and a place where services, supports, and opportunities lead to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities” (Samberg & Sheeran, 2000, p. iv). In a community school the various partners are “not conducting business as usual. They are working together toward common results; changing their funding patterns; transforming the practice of their staffs; and working creatively and respectfully with youth, families, and residents to create a different kind of institution” (Coalition of Community Schools, 2000). Community schools offer families “many avenues for involvement,” including opportunities to serve on planning and advisory boards, volunteer in schools, and be hired as teachers’ aides and outreach workers (Dryfoos, 2002, p. 11).

Although community schools have been referred to as “schools of the future,” the economic, social, and technological changes that are taking place all around us indicate that the future is already here. Community schools are schools for today because they offer a comprehensive response to the needs of 21st century children and their families. With their emphasis on providing students with extended learning opportunities, bringing together the key developmental influences in children’s lives — families, communities, and schools — and providing essential supports, protection, guidance, and opportunities, community schools are designed to help all students develop into productive adults who are able to earn a decent living, become responsible family members, and contribute to the larger society through good citizenship. (Children’s Aid Society, 2001, p. 27)

No two full-service or community schools are exactly alike, although they share similar characteristics (Dryfoos, 2002). “A wide range of models and approaches can fit into a basic community school framework” (Samberg & Sheeran, 2000, p. iv). The most common services offered are medical and dental care, mental health, and social services, although one school that was having difficulty involving parents discovered that the service they most needed was access to a laundromat since none existed in the neighborhood. The school installed two washing machines and dryers in the basement of the school, which both families and teachers began utilizing. Before long, “parents and teachers got to know one another by chatting over the washing machines” (Dryfoos, 2002).

Successful programs require a full-time coordinator or program director, “who builds a team of personnel sensitive to the issues related to youth development, cultural diversity, and community empowerment” (Dryfoos, 1996). The director “oversees the delivery of an array of supports provided by local agency partners and participates on the management team for the school” (Samberg & Sheeran, 2000, p. iv). Bilingual staff may also be essential in many locations.

Although evaluations of full-service schools have been inconclusive thus far, gains have been documented in student achievement, attendance, reduction in suspensions, reduction in high-risk behaviors, better access to services, increased parental involvement, and safer neighborhoods (Dryfoos, 2002). Full-service schools have been especially beneficial for students with disabilities because of their emphasis on prevention and early intervention, integration of services that support total well-being of students, and easy access to comprehensive services and specialists (Warger, 2001).

Wraparound services

School-community collaboration is especially crucial for students who have or are at risk for emotional and behavioral disabilities. These students have a more than 50% dropout rate and many enter the justice system after they leave (Huff, 1999). The wraparound process allows families, schools, and community teams to come together for “realistic problem-solving and creative planning” (Eber, 1999, p. 10).

Wraparound brings teachers, families, and community representatives together with a commitment to a family-centered, strength-based process. This results in the creation of unique services that support the student as well as the family, teacher, and other caregivers. Supports and services found in wraparound plans may include respite, mentors, peer supports, parent partners, and assistance for families in need of basic supports such as housing, transportation, job assistance, childcare, and health and safety supports. (Eber, 1999, p. 10)

A “key element” in this process is families, students, and professionals “reaching consensus on the outcomes they want to achieve” (Eber, 1999, p. 10). The community can play a vital role in the success of these programs, for example, in providing incentives (gift certificates, event passes, etc.) that can be used to reinforce student efforts.

Parent Training and Information Centers

Funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education, Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) are located in every state and U.S. territory. PTIs assist parents of children birth to 21 with disabilities and special needs. Each center is part of or its own independent not-for-profit organization. Together, PTIs form a national network of more than 100 centers that provide valued services, including information and referral, educational advocacy, training for parents and professionals, outreach and special events, libraries, and publications.

An important goal of all PTIs is to improve communication between parents of children with disabilities and special needs and the school personnel who work with their children. PTIs work to achieve this goal in many ways, including holding workshops for parents and professionals on topics such as parent and student rights, special education services, how the school system works, and home/school communication. PTI staff also work directly with parents and schools to obtain the most appropriate education for students with disabilities. All PTIs can refer parents to a wide range of resources in their communities, including after-school programs, camps and summer programs, tutoring, early intervention services, and much more.

School-business partnerships

School-business partnerships “are a long-established means of working with the community, and they continue to be fertile ground for improving programs offered by schools” (Dietz, 1997, p. 122). The typical ways that businesses support schools are through donations of voluntary labor and funding. Some employees serve as adult mentors for students and provide encouragement and support, especially for students with limited family involvement at home. Employees may also invite students to accompany them to work for a day to job-shadow, giving them an opportunity to learn about potential careers and the expectations of the workplace. Further, these workplaces can serve as school-to-work sites for secondary students to gain on-the-job experiences. Businesses and community agencies may also collaborate on service learning projects that engage students in a business or community-related project as part of their coursework.

School-business collaborations result in businesses gaining “a work force that’s prepared and ready for the world of work” because the businesses have been involved in helping to prepare students through opportunities such as mentoring, apprenticeship, and service learning programs (Dietz, 1997, p. 125). Other tangible benefits to business partners may include:

- research assistance using school resources or personnel
- student volunteer assistance through service learning programs
- recruitment of future employees through student career and mentoring activities
- student artwork and decorations
- student performances
- access to school recreation and exercise facilities
- free advertising in the school newspaper
- student and faculty art assistance (Dietz, 1997; Dodd & Konzal, 2002)

Strategies businesses can utilize to support home-school-community partnerships include:

- creating and adopting “family-friendly” policies (paid time off, flex time, “lunchtime flex,” part-time employment, job sharing, and other arrangements) to encourage family participation in school activities;
 - supporting employees who are parents through worksite programs (parent support groups, lunchtime parenting seminars, literacy training, etc.);
 - working to improve child care and schools through internal and community programs (child care resources, in-kind donations, and *pro bono* consulting to schools, etc.);
 - working with schools to help them better meet the needs of employed parents (“employee-friendly” scheduling of school events, family resource centers, translation of materials into native languages, etc.); and
 - supporting and sustaining family involvement strategies that prove effective.
- (U.S. Department of Education, 1995; Ballen & Moles, 1994)

The Center Without Walls

The **Center Without Walls (CWW)** program helps parents of children with disabilities or other special needs connect with programs and services for their children and themselves. A bilingual, mobile access team takes information, training, and advocacy services to community-based organizations serving immigrant, minority, and at-risk families in New York City. CWW provides on-the-spot information about schools, educational and related services, family and community resources, and respite programs. Parents can use CWW’s traveling library to access the program’s comprehensive database of programs and services.

The Center Without Walls’ multilingual Access Team provides training and helps parents in English, Spanish, Haitian, Creole, and Chinese. They can also link parents to sources of help in many other languages.

The Center Without Walls is a joint project of two Parent Training and Information Centers, Resources for Children with Special Needs, Inc. and Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., both located in New York City.

Strategy 8: *Preparing educators to work with families*

Action Steps:

- Provide ongoing professional development for school faculty and staff on ways to create family-friendly schools, build positive school-family relationships, and involve families in the education of their children
- Make positive interactions with families and encouragement of family involvement an expectation for new faculty and staff members
- Include parental perspectives in planning and implementation of professional development opportunities
- Provide opportunities for staff, families, and community members to come together to learn skills in leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and shared decision making



School, Family, and Community Relations Course University of Rochester, Rochester, NY

School, Family and Community Relations is a required course for graduate students earning masters degrees in school administration at the Warner Graduate School of Education and Human Development. The course, taught by Dr. Howard Kirschenbaum for the past seven years, introduces administrators, teachers, and counselors to *“the dramatic changes taking place in school, family, and community relations”* (Kirschenbaum, *School*, 2001, p. 1). Students survey “the wide variety of models and approaches taking place today for uniting schools, parents, and community institutions into meaningful partnerships for academic success and healthy development of young people” (Kirschenbaum, 2001, *School*, p.1). They also examine *“the many theoretical, political, and practical issues associated with these new models of collaboration”* (Kirschenbaum, *School*, 2001, p. 1).

Because he works closely with the Rochester City School District on research and implementation projects involving family involvement, including assisting in developing the district’s strategic plan for parent involvement, Dr. Kirschenbaum is able to bring his own experiences into the classroom. He also invites resource people from the school and community into the classroom, including active parent volunteers, and takes the class on field trips into the community. Students are also required to go out into the community and conduct school-case studies by interviewing parents, teachers, and administrators, and by gathering information about schools previously unfamiliar to them (Kirschenbaum, *Educating*, 2001). *“It’s a lot to cover in one course,”* said Dr. Kirschenbaum, *“but I think it’s possible to give students a good feel for the newer ‘partnership paradigm’ in education and some of the theory, research, and practice associated with it”* (personal communication, August 19, 2002).

Topics covered in the course include:

- *School-family communication*
- *Partnership models*
- *Parent involvement at school*
- *Measuring and evaluating parent involvement*
- *Parent empowerment*
- *Parent rights, school choice, and related controversial issues*
- *School-linked services*
- *Community support for schools*
- *Tutoring and mentoring*
- *School-to-work programs*
- *Service learning*
- *Issues and controversies in school-community relations*

Family as Faculty Project

The goal of the Family as Faculty project started at the University of South Florida in 1999 is to “enhance home-school partnerships by providing future educators with opportunities to listen to the voices of families from a variety of walks of life” (Family as Faculty, 2000).

The program recruits and trains a diverse group of family members to give guest lectures in education classes. Family presenters focus their talks on involvement in their children’s education, sharing experiences related to barriers and successful involvement, and telling personal stories.

Topics presented by parents have included attention deficit disorder, language barriers, socioeconomic barriers, teacher conferences, and grandparent caregiving, according to project director Dr. Jane Sergay. One parent of a child with a learning disability shared a strategy with the students of videotaping interactions with her daughter to help the teacher relate more effectively with her daughter. Some parents have brought their children to classes. Other parents have agreed to role play with students in counseling education courses.

*Participating in the Family as Faculty Program is a gratifying experience.
I have the opportunity to share positive interactions, experiences, and strategies
with my child’s educational planning team.*

(Phillis Guthman, personal communication, January 28, 2003)

Parents recruited for the program are given a three-day orientation and training during which they reflect on their experiences, identify specific issues and personal stories, and consider what makes a good presentation. They also give practice presentations and give one another feedback. Parents receive a training stipend and fee for each presentation. This program is now being replicated at other institutions, including the University of North Carolina and the University of Central Florida.

The programs described above are among a growing number nationwide that prepare educators for school-family-community collaboration. The Harvard Family Research Project is also working with teachers colleges and school districts to prepare teachers to work with parents. The project maintains a web site of syllabi for teacher preparation courses in family involvement that may be accessed from <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/syllabus/index.html>.

Nationwide there is a growing recognition of the importance of training educators in school-family-community collaboration, although “*in practice* such training is not happening as widely or quickly as necessary” (Kirschenbaum, Educating, 2001, p. 188). Surveys of higher education practices over the past two decades indicate that more institutions are incorporating family involvement into teacher preparation coursework, although only a minority of institutions offer a “comprehensive program in school-family-community relations that gives educators a thorough grounding in the theory, research, and practice of partnerships” (Kirschenbaum, Educating, 2001, p. 188). An ongoing debate centers on whether colleges and universities should offer required courses in school-community-family involvement or “infuse the content throughout the curriculum,” or both (Kirschenbaum, Educating, 2001, p. 194).

Policies and practices

With the addition in 1994 of Goal 8 to the Goals 2000 legislation, which states: “Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children” (U.S. Department of Education, *Goals 2000*, 1994), more attention has been given to the growing body of evidence demonstrating the positive impact of school-family-community collaborations. At the same time, there is recognition of a “serious discrepancy” between preservice preparation of teachers and the types of family involvement activities that teachers are increasingly expected to perform (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider, & Lopez, 1997). Until recently, most state certification departments did not require courses on family involvement for preservice educators. Since the late 1990s the number of states requiring that teachers have knowledge and skills related to parent and community involvement has increased significantly, and many states have begun to mandate preservice training and ongoing professional development in family involvement and school-family-community partnerships (Kirschenbaum, Educating, 2001; Hiatt-Michael, *Preparing*, 2001; Gray, 2001). However, California is the only state thus far that has enacted legislation mandating preservice and practicing teachers “to serve as active partners with parents and guardians in the education of children” (California Education Code 44291.2, 1993).

The Massachusetts State Department of Education’s *Parent, Family, and Community Involvement Guide* (2000) recommends that training in family-school-community involvement for both preservice and practicing teachers include:

- Research findings and information on the benefits of family involvement
- Strategies for helping educators “develop the skills, sensitivity, and insight necessary to work effectively with parents representing a variety of family structures and cultural backgrounds”
- Strategies for helping school staff to create a welcoming school environment
- Methods of developing “effective parent outreach and engagement strategies, including the regular two-way communication between the school and home”
- Strategies to overcome barriers to family involvement
- Development of effective communication skills
- Models of successful school, family, and community partnerships and methods for building these partnerships
- Community resources and programs and strategies for connecting families with these resources
- Opportunities for staff, families, and community members to come together to learn skills in leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and shared decision making (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000)

The Council for Exceptional Children (2000) recommends the following knowledge and skills that new teachers need to have in order to work effectively with families:

Knowledge:

- Culturally responsive factors that promote effective communication and collaboration with individuals, families, school personnel, and community members.
- Concerns of families who have children with exceptional learning needs and strategies to help address these concerns:
- Family systems and the role of families in supporting development and educational progress.

Skills:

- Foster respectful and beneficial relationships between families and professionals.
- Assist individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families in becoming active participants in the educational team.
- Plan and conduct collaborative conferences with individuals with exceptional learning needs and their families. (p. 26)

Additional skills are recommended for early childhood special educators, including the following:

- Establish and maintain positive, collaborative relationships with families.
- Apply family systems theory and knowledge of the dynamics, roles, and relationships within families and communities.
- Demonstrate sensitivity to differences in family structures and social and cultural backgrounds.
- Assist families in identifying their resources, priorities, and concerns in relation to their child's development.
- Respect parents' choices and goals for children and communicate effectively with parents about curriculum and children's progress.
- Involve families in assessing and planning for their children's education, including children with special needs.
- Implement a range of family-oriented services based on the family's identified resources, priorities, and concerns.
- Implement family services consistent with due process safeguards.
- Evaluate services with families (pp. 50-51)

The national associations that accredit or set standards for teacher preparation programs — the **The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education** (NCATE) and the **National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification** (NASDTEC) have added or strengthened indicators addressing parent involvement. Similarly, **The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards** includes parent involvement competencies among 11 generalist standards for educators (Hiatt-Michael, *Preparing*, 2001).

In *New Skills for New Schools*, Shartrand, Weiss, and Lopez (1997) offer a comprehensive framework that “illustrates the range of training for family involvement” to prepare teachers:

<i>Family Involvement Framework for Teacher Training</i>	
Type	Goals
<i>General Family Involvement</i>	To provide general information on the goals of, benefits of, and barriers to family involvement. To promote knowledge of, skills in, and positive attitudes toward involving parents
<i>General Family Knowledge</i>	To promote knowledge of different families’ cultural beliefs, childrearing practices, structures, and living environments. To promote an awareness of and respect for different backgrounds and lifestyles
<i>Home-School Communication</i>	To provide techniques and strategies to improve two-way communication between home an school (and/or parent and teacher)
<i>Family Involvement in Learning Activities</i>	To provide information on how to involve parents in their children’s learning outside of the classroom
<i>Families Supporting Schools</i>	To provide information on ways to involve parents in helping the school, both within and outside the classroom
<i>Schools Supporting Families</i>	To examine how schools can support families’ social, educational, and social service needs through parent education programs, parent centers, and referrals to other community or social services
<i>Families as Change Agents</i>	To introduce ways to support and involve parents and families in decision making, action research, child advocacy, parent and teacher training, and development of policy, programs, and curriculum

Maintaining that “no one method of instruction can prepare teachers to work effectively with families and communities,” Shartrand, Weiss, and Lopez (1997) advocate for approaches that are “comprehensive, integrated, and varied.” Best practices they recommend include “providing prospective teachers with opportunities to develop problem-solving skills by exposing them to challenging situations that require them to negotiate sensitive issues,” and having them work in schools and communities under the guidance of experienced professionals, where they apply research skills for a better understanding of families and communities and utilize information to develop family involvement activities.

Among the nine recommendations made by the *New Skills for New Schools* study, five directly address school-family-community collaborations:

1. Make training available to elementary, middle, and high school teachers; early childhood educators receive more preservice training than other teachers
2. Improve the effectiveness of training through collaboration across subspecialties and disciplines — health and social services
3. Integrate training throughout the teacher preparation curriculum rather than treating it as an isolated component
4. Sustain teachers' knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes toward families through inservice training
5. Move beyond classroom-based teaching methods by offering teachers direct field experiences working with families

Ongoing professional development for teachers is needed as family structures continue to change, requiring “new or different family outreach strategies from what may have been effective in the past” (U.S. Department of Education, 1997). These trainings may include topics such as strategies for contacting parents, students' home culture, appreciation of diversity, effective communication, conflict resolution, team building, and ways to involve parents as leaders and decision-makers in the school. In addition, as more children with disabilities are included in the general education curriculum, both special and regular educators will need training that focuses on effectively interacting with parents of children with disabilities to involve them as equal partners in the educational planning and decision-making process for their child (Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2002).

In addressing issues related to poverty, professional development for educators needs to change the focus from mothers in poverty as contributors, to the problem of underachieving students, to “how the schools, as powerful institutions of social control, reproduce inequalities of social class and stereotypes of the poor” (Bloom, 2001) and “socialize children into a white, middle-class system,” promoting values which may be in opposition to the values of some families in the school (Dodd & Konzal, 2002, p. 28). Possible topics for discussion include poverty and privilege, stereotyping, unrealistic middle-class expectations for families living in poverty, and recognition of the strengths of families as a balance for any limitations.

Parents as teachers

Parents of different cultures, such as Native American, Hispanic, and Asian, can take an active role in presenting parental perspectives in professional development opportunities for teachers that focus on family involvement. In California, “mentor parents” provide professional development to school staff on parent involvement and home-school communication. One workshop addressed obstacles to parent involvement in schools, including parents' negative past experiences that discourage participation, and perceived teacher biases based on parents' different socioeconomic status, race, gender, physical appearance, or language ability (U.S. Department of Education, *Family Involvement*, 1997).

Reading at Home

Reading at Home is a course taught by parents to parents of K-3 students in several Illinois Solid Foundation Schools. The course helps parents encourage children to develop a lifelong love of reading. Parents who take the course attend three weekly, 90-minute sessions that are taught in groups of ten and led by parents trained as group leaders. Parents learn activities and exercises to do with their children and then share experiences with the group. Many of the activities require no previous planning or extra supplies. In several schools where students speak more than one language, parent volunteers are translating the course into multiple languages. (Reading at Home, 2001)

Evaluation

As schools implement new practices in family involvement, the benefits for students, parents, staff, the school, and the community need to be evaluated on an ongoing basis (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997; Funkhouser & Gonzales, 1997). Surveys of families, school staff, and community members regarding participation in and satisfaction with family involvement activities; interviews; sign-in sheets for parent volunteers; and comparisons of “before and after” practices are all ways to assess the effectiveness of practices. These evaluations can be formal or informal, but “it is important to learn how each practice is working to inform future plans and improvements” (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997, p. 30). Schools should remain open to suggestions from parents about how their involvement can be improved (Rosenthal & Sawyers, 1996). In schools with family coordinators, the family coordinator can take a lead role in coordinating evaluation activities.

The following is a list of evaluation instruments that can be utilized to assess the benefits of family involvement practices and school-home-community practices.

Family Involvement Evaluation Instruments

Appendix F: Schools that Say “Welcome” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 1996)

Checklist for a Welcoming First Impression of Your School (Caplan, 2001, pp. 51-52)

Checklist for Improving Parental Involvement (Jesse, 1995)

Checklist for Improving Parent Involvement (North Carolina Public Schools, 2003)

Checklist of Quality Indicators of the Six National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement (Available in English, Chinese, Cambodian, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese) (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, pp. 210-214)

Educator Reflection: Gathering Perceptions and Collaborating on Results (Blank & Kershaw, 1998)

End-of-Year Evaluation: School-family-community partnerships (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997, pp. 137-143)

Evaluating PTA Parent/Family Involvement Activities (National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships* 2000, p. 222)

Evaluating Group Process (National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000, pp. 215-216)

Faculty Survey (National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000, pp. 211-212)

Family Friendly Schools Checklist (The Florida Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, no date)

Father-Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment and Planning Tool for Early Childhood Education Programs (National Head Start Association, 2002)

How Welcome are Parents in our School? (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, *Questionnaire*, 1996)

Inventory for Creating School-Family Connections (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, pp. 223-227)

Inventory of Present Practices of School-Family-Community Partnerships (Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997, pp. 122-125)

Parent Involvement in Our Schools (National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000, pp. 201-204)

Parent Involvement Inventory (Illinois State Board of Education, 1994; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, *Parent*, 1996)

Parent Survey (National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000, pp. 205-209)

Resource 1-1: Survey on Parent Involvement (Dietz, 1997, pp. 7-12)

Resource 1-2: Learning Together—A Checklist for Schools (Dietz, 1997, pp. 13-15)

Resource 1-3: Decision-Making Table (Dietz, 1997, pp. 16-18)

School-community self-assessment on community and parent engagement based on five community values (Fresno Unified Schools, 2002)

Self-Assessment Tool for Schools to Evaluate Parent/Family Involvement (National PTA, *Self-Assessment*, 2003)

Survey (self-study) – Home Involvement in Schooling (Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, 1996)

Taking Stock: Checklists for Self-Assessment (Henderson, Marburger, & Ooms, 1986, pp. 79-93)

Using the Model to Guide Parent Involvement Practice (Hornby, 2000, pp. 27-31)

School-Home-Community Evaluation Instruments

Building Community – Strengthening Partnerships: Parent Survey (Blank & Kershaw, 1998, pp. 25-27)

Building Community – Strengthening Partnerships: Community Survey (Blank & Kershaw, 1998, pp. 28-29)

Checklist of Quality Indicators of the Six National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement (Available in English, Chinese, Cambodian, Korean, Spanish, and Vietnamese (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, pp. 210-214; National PTA, *Building Successful Partnerships*, 2000)

Community School Partnership Assessment (Blank & Langford, 2000)

Ideas into Practice: School-Community Partnerships: Self-Study Survey

(Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, Ideas, 1999, p. 9)

Parent Involvement Inventory (Illinois State Board of Education; 1994; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, *Parent*, 1996)

School-community self-assessment on community and parent engagement based on five community values.
(Fresno Unified Schools, 2002)

Survey (self-study) –School-Community Partnerships (Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical Assistance Center, *School-community Partnerships*, 1999)

Sample Calendar of Family Involvement Activities

August

Home visits

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Ongoing evaluation of activities

September

First Day of School activities

Positive phone calls to all families

Parent-friendly letter/survey of volunteer
interest sent home

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Open House Ice Cream Social

Welcome Folders sent to each new family

After-school workshop for teachers: Working with
culturally diverse families (parent facilitators)

Action Team meeting

Family support group meeting

Ongoing evaluation of activities

October

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Dad/Child Saturday Breakfast

Bring Your Parents to School Day

ESL classes for family members

Family Science Night

Welcome Folders sent to each new family

Family Education Workshop: Positive parenting strategies

Family support group meeting

Ongoing evaluation of activities

November

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Parent-teacher conferences (morning and evening)

Grandparents Day

Family Education Workshop: Second-time-around
parenting for grandparents

Welcome Folders sent to each new family

Action Team meeting

ESL classes for family members

Family Math Night

Family support group meeting

Ongoing evaluation of activities

December

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Welcome Folders sent to each new family

Family Education Workshop: Monitoring
television/computer time

Family support group meeting

Ongoing evaluation of activities

January

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Welcome Folders sent to each new family

Action Team meeting

Family Education Workshop: Anger management

Family support group meeting

Ongoing evaluation of activities

February

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Family Science Night
GED classes for family members
Welcome Folders sent to each new family
After-school workshop for teachers: Working with
families who have children with disabilities
(parent facilitators)
Family Education Workshop: Keeping children
safe from abduction
Family support group meeting
Ongoing evaluation of activities

March

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Take Your Child to Work Day
Welcome Folders sent to each new family
GED classes for family members
Family Math Night
Action Team meeting
Family Education Workshop:
Preventing substance abuse
Family support group meeting
Ongoing evaluation of activities

April

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Mom/Child Saturday Breakfast
Welcome Folders sent to each new family
Family Education Workshop:
Effective communication with teachers
International festival for families
Parent-teacher conferences (morning and evening)
Family support group meeting
Ongoing evaluation of activities

May

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Teacher Appreciation Week
Recognition awards for volunteers
Transition Student/Parent Activities for graduating students
Welcome Folders sent to each new family
Family Education Workshop: Summer learning activities
for families
Family support group meeting
Action Team meeting
Ongoing evaluation of activities

June

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Action Team meets to plan for coming year
Summative evaluation of year's activities

July

Family Center open 8 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Action Team meets to plan for coming year
Summative evaluation of year's activities

Contacts/Resources

Introduction:

Academic Development Institute
The Center for the School Community
Family Study Institute
Illinois Family Education Center
121 N. Kickapoo St.
Lincoln, IL 62656
Phone: (217) 732-6462
Web site: <http://www.adi.org>

Family Friendly Schools
13080 Brookmead Drive
Manassas, VA 20112
Phone: (800) 648-6082
Web site: <http://www.familyfriendlyschools.org/>

Family Involvement Network of Educators
Harvard Family Research Project
Longfellow Hall
Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: (617) 495-9108
Web site:
<http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/syllabus/index.html>

Fathers Network
11620 NE Eighth St.
Bellevue, WA 98008-3937
Phone: (425) 747-4004, ext. 218
E-mail: jmay@fathersnetwork.org
Web site: <http://www.fathersnetwork.org/674.html>

Institute for Responsive Education
Northeastern University
40 Nightingale Hall
Boston, MA 02115
Phone: (617) 373-2595
Web site: <http://www.dac.neu.edu/ire/home.html>

Mental Health in Schools Training and Technical
Assistance Center
UCLA / School Mental Health Project
Department of Psychology
P.O. Box 951563
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563
Phone: (310) 825-3634
E-mail: smhp@ucla.edu
Web site: <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

MetLife Foundation Teacher-Parent Engagement Through
Partnerships Initiative
National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
Web site: <http://www.ncpie.org/>

National Center for Family and Community Connections
with Schools
Emerging Issues in School, Family, and Community
Connections
Web site: <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/>

National Center for Family and Community Connections
with Schools
The Connection Collection: School-Family-Community
Connections Database
Web site: <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/>

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
(NCPIE)
1201 16th St. N. W., Box 39
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 822-8405
Web site: <http://www.ncpie.org>

National Network of Partnership Schools
Johns Hopkins University
3003 N. Charles St., Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
Phone: (410) 615-8818
E-mail: nnps@csos.jhu.edu
Web site: <http://www.partnershipschools.org>

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
330 North Wabash Ave.
Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
Phone: (312) 670-6782
E-mail: info@pta.org
Web site: <http://www.pta.org/>

National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse
Recruiting New Teachers
385 Concord Ave., Suite 103
Belmont, MA 02478
Phone: (617) 489-6000
Web site: <http://www.recruitingteachers.org/index.html>

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education
U. S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-8173
Phone: 1-800-USA-LEARN
E-mail: partner@ed.gov
Web site:
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/whoweare/Overview.html>

Strategy 1:

Buffalo Public School #45
Colleen Carota, Principal
141 Hoyt
Buffalo, NY 14213
Phone: (716) 888-7077

The Fatherhood Project/Families and Work Institute
267 Fifth Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10016
Phone: (212) 465-2044
E-mail: jlevine@familiesandwork.org
Web site: <http://www.fatherhoodproject.org>

National Fatherhood Initiative
101 Lake Forest Boulevard, Suite 360
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877
Phone: (301) 948-0599
Web site: <http://www.fatherhood.org/>

Rush-Henrietta Central School District
Rush-Henrietta Family Center
Kay Lyons, Partnership Schools Facilitator
Vollmer Building
150 Telephone Road
West Henrietta, NY
Phone: (716) 359-7915 or 7912
E-mail: Klyons@rhnet.org
Web site: <http://www.rhnet.org/>

Urbana Middle School
Barbara Linder, Community Connections Coordinator
West Campus
1201 S. Vine
Urbana, IL 61801
Phone: (217) 337-0853
E-mail: linderba@cmi.k12.il.us
Web site: <http://www.cmi.k12.il.us/Urbana/ums/>

Strategy 2:

Academic Development Institute
The Center for the School Community
Family Study Institute
Illinois Family Education Center
121 N. Kickapoo Street
Lincoln, IL 62656
Web site: <http://www.adi.org/>

Buffalo Parent Center
Bonnie Nelson, Supervisor
Buffalo Board of Education
15 E. Genesee
Buffalo, NY 14203
Phone: (716) 851-3651 or 52
Web site: <http://www.buffaloschools.org/news/newsstory.asp?newsid=70>

Family Friendly Schools
13080 Brookmead Drive
Manassas, VA 20112
Phone: (800) 648-6082
Web site: <http://www.familyfriendlyschools.org/>

Fresno Unified School District
Parent Engagement Center
2940 N. Blackstone
Fresno, CA 93703
Phone: (559) 241-7237
Web site: <http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us/>

Greensville Public Schools
Dr. Margaret Lee, Title I Coordinator/Elementary
Supervisor
105 Ruffin St.
Emporia, VA 23847
Phone: (434) 634-3748
Web site: <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/Div/Greensville/>

Parent Partnership Network
Michele Abdul Sabur, Parent Advocate
Syracuse City School District
725 Harrison St.
Syracuse, NY 13210
Phone: (315) 435-4148
E-mail: mabdusab@freeside.scsd.k12.ny.us
Web site: http://www.syracusecityschools.com/scsd_alt.php?aud=4

Family Support and Resource Center
Howard County Public Schools
Longfellow Elementary School
5470 Hesperus Ave.
Columbia, MD
(410) 313-7161
Web site: <http://www.howard.k12.md.us/special/parent/center.html>

Rochester Action Center
Barbara Jarzyniecki, Chief Communications Director
30 Hart St.
Rochester, NY 14605
Phone: (716) 262-8070
E-mail: Barbara.jarzyniecki@rcsdk12.org
Web site: <http://www.rcsdk12.org/pac>

Strategy 3:

First Day Foundation, 210 Main Street
PO Box 10
Bennington, Vermont 05201-0010
Toll Free Phone: 1-877-FIRST DAY
E-mail: firstday@sover.net
Web site: <http://www.firstday.com/>

Galena Middle School
114 S. Main
Galena, MD 21635
Phone: (410) 648-5132
Web site:
<http://www.kent.k12.md.us/kcps/gms/schoolinfo.html>

Harmony Hills Elementary School
Barbara Hildreth, Principal
Madelon K. Hickey Way
Cohoes, NY 12047
Phone: (518) 233-1900
E-mail: bhildret@cohoes.org

Howard County Public Schools
10910 Route 108
Ellicott City, MD 21042
Phone: (410) 313-6682
Web site: <http://www.howard.k12.md.us/>

League of Women Voters of Minneapolis
Young Quinlan Bldg.
81 South 9th Street, Suite 335
Minneapolis, MN 55402
Phone: (612) 333-6319

Minneapolis Public Schools
807 NE Broadway
Minneapolis, MN 55413
Phone: (612) 668-0000
Web site: <http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us>

Monica Leary Elementary School
Sue Mills, Principal
5509 E. Henrietta
Rush, NY 14543
Phone: (716) 359-5468
E-mail: smills@rhnet.org
Web site: <http://www.rhnet.org/>

Quitman Street Community School
Louis A. Mattina, Principal
21 Quitman Street
Newark, New Jersey 07103
Phone: (973) 733-6947
Web site:
http://www.nps.k12.nj.us/quitman_st/index.htm

Rush-Henrietta Central School District
Rush-Henrietta Family Center
Kay Lyons, Partnership Schools Facilitator
Vollmer Building
150 Telephone Road
West Henrietta, NY
Phone: (716) 359-7915 or 7912
E-mail: Klyons@rhnet.org
Web site: <http://www.rhnet.org/>

Strategy 4:

Arminta Elementary School
11530 Strathern Street
North Hollywood, CA 91605
Phone: (818) 765 - 5911
Fax: (818) 764 - 9648
Web site:
http://www.lausd.k12.ca.us/Arminta_EL/index.htm

Colvin Elementary School
2820 S. Roosevelt
Wichita, KS 67210
Phone: (316) 973-7600
Web site: <http://colvin.usd259.org/>

Fayetteville Elementary School
Nancy Smith, Principal
700 South Manlius Street
Fayetteville, NY 13066
Phone: (315) 682-1320
E-mail: nsmith@fm.cnyric.org

Lora B. Peck Elementary School
Tameka Qualls, Project Manager
Houston Independent School District
5130 Arvilla
Houston, TX 77021-2996
Phone: (713) 845-7463

Middleburgh Central School District
John Metallo, Superintendent
181 Main Street
Middleburgh, NY 12122
Phone: (518) 827-5567
E-mail: metallo@rocketmail.com

Paideia School
1509 Ponce de Leon Ave.
Atlanta, GA
Phone: (404) 377-3491
Web site: <http://www.paideiaschool.org/>

Pioneer Central School District
Box 579
County Line Road
Yorkshire, NY 14173
Phone: (716) 492-9300
Fax: (716) 492-9360
Web site: <http://www.pioneer.wnyric.org/>

Ridgetop Elementary School
Maria Teresa Flores, Parent Involvement Coordinator
5005 Caswell Ave.
Austin, TX 78751
Phone: (512) 414-4469
Web site: <http://www.austinschools.org/ridgetop/>

Strategy 5:

Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships
Johns Hopkins University
3505 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218
Phone: (410) 518-8800
Web site: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm>

Going On To College Program
Mary Silva, Program Coordinator
Families in Schools
Los Angeles Public Schools
(213) 484-2870, ext. 233
E-mail: msilva@familiesinschools.org

Hull Middle School
Harristina Stephens, Learning disabilities teacher
1950 Old Peachtree Rd.
Duluth, GA 30097
Phone: (770) 232-3200
Fax: (770) 232-3203
E-mail: Harristina_Stephens@gwinnett.k12.ga.us

Keshequa Central School District
Ms. Lori Gray, PTSA President
15 Mill St.
Nunda, NY 14517
Phone: 585-476-2234 x1213
E-mail: dgraze@yahoo.com
Web site: <http://www.kcs.k12.ny.us/default.htm>

University of Florida
Dr. Jennifer M. Asmus
Department of Educational Psychology
P. O. Box 117047
Gainesville, FL 32611-7047
Phone: (352) 392-0723
E-mail: Jasmus@coe.ufl.edu

University of Vermont
Dr. Pam Key
School Research Office
Department of Education
429 Waterman Building
Burlington, VT 05405-0160
Phone: (802) 656-8551
E-mail: pkay@zoo.uvm.edu

Strategy 6:

The BUILD Academy
Mary Kay Muscarella, Technology Integration Specialist
340 Fougerson St.
Buffalo, NY 14211
Phone: (716) 897-8110

Community School District #10
Mario Fico, Director of Information Technology
One Fordham Plaza
Bronx, NY 10458
Phone: (718) 329-8064
Web site: <http://www.csd10.org/>

Commonwealth Institute for Parent Leadership
Beverly N. Raimondo, Director
Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence
Lexington, KY
Phone: (859) 233-9849 or (800) 928-2111
Web site: <http://www.cipl.org/index.html>

Ensley Elementary School
501 E. Johnson Avenue
Pensacola, FL 32514
Phone: (850) 494-5600
Web site: <http://www.escambia.k12.fl.us/schscnts/ense/>

Grove Park Elementary School #224
5545 Kennison Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21215
Phone: (410) 396-0822

Living for the Young Family Through Education
Joan Davis, Assistant Principal
22 E. 128th St.
New York, NY 10035
Phone: (212) 831-1049

Monica Leary Elementary School
Sue Mills, Principal
5509 E. Henrietta
Rush, NY 14543
Phone: (716) 359-5468
E-mail: smills@rhnet.org
Web site: <http://www.rhnet.org/>

Parent Partnership Network
Michele Abdul Sabur, Parent Advocate
Syracuse City School District
725 Harrison St.
Syracuse, NY 13210
Phone: (315) 435-4148
E-mail: mabdusab@freeside.scsd.k12.ny.us

Richard H. Hungerford School
Dr. Mary McInerey, Principal
155 Tompkins Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10304
Phone: (718) 273-8622
Fax: (718) 727-6994
Web site:
<http://schools.nycenet.edu/d75/P721R/default.htm>

Stillwater Area School District
1875 South Greeley Street
Stillwater, MN 55082
Phone: (651) 351-8340
Fax: (651) 351-8380
Web site: <http://www.stillwater.k12.mn.us/834/>

Strategy 7:

14th Street-Union Square Local Development Corporation
Michelle Jarney, Director of Education
40 Irving Place
New York City, NY 10003
Phone: (212) 460-1200
E-mail: JarneyM@coned.com

Children's Aid Society
Richard Negron
102 East 22nd St.
New York, NY 10010
Phone: (212) 254-4587
E-mail: Richard@childrensaidsociety.org
Web site: <http://www.childrensaid.net/>

Center Without Walls
Resources for Children with Special Needs, Inc.
116 East 16th Street, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10003
Phone: (212) 677-4650
E-mail: info@resourcesntc.org
Web site: <http://www.resourcesnyc.org/>

Coalition for Community Schools
c/o Institute for Educational Leadership
1001 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 822-8405
E-mail: ccs@iel.org
Web site: <http://www.communityschools.org/>

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
Needs
1101 King Street, Suite 420
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Phone: (703) 684-7710
Web site: <http://www.ffcmh.org/>

New York City Department of Youth and Community
Development.
Beacon Programs
New York, NY
Phone: (212) 676-8255
Web site: <http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/>

Washington Irving High School
Jenny Bailey, Program Director
4 Irving Place
New York, NY 10003
Phone: (212) 358-1065

Strategy 8:

Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships
Johns Hopkins University
3505 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21218
Phone: (410) 518-8800
Web site: <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm>

Florida Partnership for Family Involvement in Education
Jane Sergay, Director
University of South Florida
3500 E. Fletcher Ave., Suite 225
Tampa, FL 33613
Phone: (813) 558-5365
E-mail: jsergay@tempest.coedu.usf.edu
Web site: <http://fndfl.org/partnership/>

Harvard Family Research Project
Longfellow Hall
Appian Way
Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: (617) 495-9108
Web site: <http://gseweb.harvard.edu>

University of Rochester
Dr. Howard Kirschenbaum
Warner Graduate School of Education and Human
Development
Rochester, New York 14627-0425
Phone: (585) 275-5077
E-mail: kirs@troi.cc.rochester.edu

Other Resources:

Connect for Success: Building a Teacher, Parent, Teen Alliance

National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse

Web site: <http://www.recruitingteachers.org/news/2002pitoolkit.html>

Family-school-community partnerships: A compilation of professional standards of practice for teachers

Harvard Family Research Project

Web site: <http://gsweb.harvard.edu>

Home school communication workshop

Harvard Family Research Project

Web site: http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/materials/home-school_workshop.html

Teens as Parents of Babies and Toddlers: A Resource Guide for Education

Cornell University Resource Center

Ithaca, NY 14850

National PTA Model Parent Policy:

<http://www.pta.org/programs/append.htm>

School district parent involvement policies:

Alexandria City, VA (Epstein, 2001)

Chaska, MN (Chaska Public Schools, 1989)

Chicago, IL (National PTA, Building Successful Partnerships, 2000)

Jefferson County, CO (Jefferson County, 2001)

Milwaukee, WI (Dietz, Resource 1-4, 1997)

Montgomery County, MD (Epstein, 2001)

New York City, NY (Establishment, 2002).

San Diego, CA (Dietz, Resource 1-4, 1997)

Syracuse, NY (Epstein, 2001)

Tacoma, WA (Dietz, Resource 1-4, 1997)

State parent involvement policies:

California (Epstein, 2001)

Connecticut (Connecticut, 1998; Epstein, 2001)

Kentucky (Epstein, 2001)

Resources for designing school web pages:

Designing Exemplary School Web sites: <http://www.caller2.com/grantms/schoolweb.html>

West Central Four Intermediate Service Agency: http://www.wc4.org/expemplary_school_web_sites.htm

Videotapes:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Producer). (1992). *Involving parents in education* [Videotape].

Bateman, B., & Kinney, T. (Producers). (2001). *Emerging issues in special education* [Videotape].
(Available from: Program Development Associates)

Bateman, B., & Kinney, T. (Producers). (2000). *IEP success*. [Videotape].
(Available from Attainment Company, Cicero, NY)

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